



280 P92d

---

## Keep Your Card in This Pocket

---

Books will be issued only on presentation of proper library cards.

Unless labeled otherwise, books may be retained for two weeks. Borrowers finding books marked, defaced or mutilated are expected to report same at library desk; otherwise the last borrower will be held responsible for all imperfections discovered.

The card holder is responsible for all books drawn on this card.

Penalty for over-due books 2c a day plus cost of notices.

Lost cards and change of residence must be reported promptly.



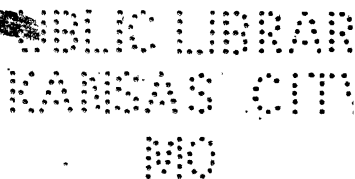
**Public Library**  
**Kansas City, Mo.**

---

## Keep Your Card in This Pocket

---





DATE DUE

JUL 2 '48	51
SEP 10 '48	
OCT 11 '48	78
DEC 7 '48	26
NOV 8 '49	47
MAR 15 '50	64
JUL 5 '50	31
MAY JAN 13 1986	





## DEW ON JORDAN



PUBLIC LIBRARY  
KANSAS CITY  
MO



# DEW ON JORDAN

---

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY, Inc. NEW YORK

..... All rights reserved

245777



000

FIRST EDITION

*No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in magazine or newspaper or radio broadcast.*

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
BY THE WILLIAM BYRD PRESS, INC.  
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

*To Our Son*

HILLEL DAVID — “Mr. Bun”

Heir to the cultures of synagogues and brush arbors



# CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	9
<b>SANCTIFIED FOLKS</b>	
<i>Chapter I</i>	Country of the Word 17
<i>Chapter II</i>	A Sect Is Born 22
<i>Chapter III</i>	Falling of the Latter Rain 29
<i>Chapter IV</i>	Snakes in Eden 39
<i>Chapter V</i>	Healin on Blackberry Mountain 50
<i>Chapter VI</i>	Cedar Brake Miracle 63
<i>Chapter VII</i>	Ascension on Rainey Street 80
<i>Chapter VIII</i>	Harps and Hoe Handles 94
<b>LAY MY BURDENS DOWN</b>	
<i>Chapter IX</i>	Uncle Billy the Baptist 105
<i>Chapter X</i>	Hardshellers and Bull Nettlers 111
<i>Chapter XI</i>	Baptizin on Wildcat River 122
<i>Chapter XII</i>	Footwashin at Little Hurricane 132
<i>Chapter XIII</i>	Dinner on the Grounds 143
<i>Chapter XIV</i>	Heresy at Horse Cave 151
<i>Chapter XV</i>	Prophets of the Crooked Cross 165
<b>GOD'S REMNANT PEOPLE</b>	
<i>Chapter XVI</i>	"I Stand at Armageddon" 183
<i>Chapter XVII</i>	Watchers of a Hundred Years 189
<i>Chapter XVIII</i>	Feudin under the Olives 198
<i>Chapter XIX</i>	In Yashua's Name 207
<i>Chapter XX</i>	Future of the Small Sects 215





## INTRODUCTION

Before the authors finished this book, they tramped two miles up a steep trail to the cabin of Sister Sadie Hartson, deaconess of the (Original) Church of God at Stoney Fork, Virginia. Long before we reached the one-room shanty we felt our hearts warmed by the echo of an old hymn which became more distinct as we trudged across rocks and moss:

“O marvelous grace that has rescued me,  
O joyous moment when Jesus I see,  
O happy day when like Him I'll be,  
Five minutes after I die.”

When we hove in sight, Sister Hartson stopped stirring the mess of fatback and greens simmering in the pot for her “old man” who was cutting timber on the other side of Lowry's Ridge.

“I know'd you'd be comin along this mornin,” she greeted us. “Last night the Lord come to me in a vision and told me he was sendin somebody with seven cents.”

Sister Hartson was collecting money to pay for a linotype machine needed to get out her denomination's misspelled, almost incoherent little newspaper published down in Chattanooga. By selling chickens at the county seat, by slipping out her husband's terbacker money—Mr. Hartson is still unregenerate and “chaws like a grasshopper roostin on a broomweed”—she had raised all of \$2.93. Would we contribute seven cents so that she might send Brother Scott, the editor, an even three dollars to meet the next installment on that linotype?

We handed Sister Hartson a nickel and two pennies which she carefully put away in the cracked sugar bowl that serves as her bank. Then over buttermilk and a fresh home-made ash cake, we told her what a linotype looked like and how

it worked. In return Sister Hartson told us about God—as simply as if He were some neighbor living across Lowry's Ridge—and how He walked with her as she hung out her washing or hoed in her garden.

"He come to me one cool mornin as I was a-settin out collards," she declared with deep conviction. "He says to me, 'Ol woman, you're gone to roast hotter'n a coon in a skillet if you don't change yore ways.'

"I tromped down all them collards a-gittin right with Him that mornin. I hollered so loud that my ol man throwed down his axe and come runnin in from the woods thinkin that mean old cow done hooked me sure. I was the out-cuss-fightenest woman in three counties when the Lord put His hand on me. Now, praise His name, He done took the meanness out of my heart and the nasty old snuff brush out of my mouth."

We praised Sister Hartson's ash cake as well as the wonderful change the Word had wrought in her life.

"How come that fine edjucated folks like you tromped all that long way to Stoney Fork to study bout the Original Church of God?" she wanted to know.

We've been asked pretty much the same question by members of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, the Assemblies of God, the Saints of the Solid Rock, the Duck River Baptists, the Two Seed in the Spirit Predestinarian Baptists, and by the faithful of dozens of other little sects we've visited all over the country.

The answers go back to a little boy in Austin, Texas, and a little girl in Nashville, Tennessee.

Twenty-five years ago the boy, Harold, might have been found sitting wide-eyed and open-mouthed in a brush arbor meeting of the Nazarenes, dodging spitballs aimed at him by less reverent schoolmates bombarding the saints from the bushes that grow along Shoal Creek.

The little girl, Celia, it may be, was at the same time

cautiously sneaking away from her pious grandfather, Reb Fyva, walking his sedate way toward the synagogue. Reb Fyva—bless his soul—would never miss his granddaughter till he sat down in the *Schule* and began winding the tfellum around his bony arm. By that time the little girl would be in the Oneness Holiness Tabernacle, “jinin in” with the congregation of Brother Holdhammer, the ex-convict evangelist from Oklahoma, as he twanged his guitar and led the saints in a hymn of his own composition:

“Oh, I’m just out of jail,  
The Son of God has gone my bail.”

But in the case of Harold the answer goes back farther than that—much farther. His mother had rocked her children to sleep to the tune of an old ballad sung by the Protestant sects of the Reformation:

“There was a Romish lady  
Brought up in Popery,  
Her mother always told her  
The priests she must obey”

—along with the “sanctified songs” of the great Holiness revival that had hit the North Texas farmers, with the grasshoppers, back in 1900.

And before that, away way back there, Harold’s Great-Great-Great-Grandfather Martin had been a one-gallused Baptist preacher in aristocratic Virginia. Great-Granddaddy Martin and other Baptists exhorters like him had preached the Word that had caused Baptist blacksmiths and farmers to line up with Mr. Tom Jefferson in the big battle to disestablish the state church of Virginia.

It was the Word, divinely inspired in every comma and every syllable, that had been their cloud by day and their pillar of fire by night—back there when a nation was shaping up out of the Virginia backwoods.

It was the Word, interpreted as they variously under-

stood it, without the nuances of rite and incense, which like seed sown in the earth caused the little clapboard churches of a hundred sects to crop up from the soil as fast as it grew sour grass and poke "sallet."

It was the Word which guided new generations of the pioneers from Virginia into Kentucky and Tennessee, from Kentucky and Tennessee into Arkansas and Texas, from Texas into Oklahoma and to the last states to be settled in the West.

It was the Word that brought German Mennonites from Russia to the prairies of Kansas and South Dakota and Plymouth Brethren from England and Ireland to transplant their schisms and feuds to New York and Kansas City.

For the promise of the Word is that some day the children of the Word will find a land of milk and honey where each man may eat of his own vine, sit under his own fig tree and whittle on his own sticks.

It was the spell of the Word which haunted Harold during the long years he worked as a newspaperman, when he chased fire wagons by day and queer little cults by night. For the Word is in his blood, and some twenty of his kin-folks in Texas and Oklahoma preach the Word in a dozen different sects. He says the only reason why he never got to be an apostle of the Word is that he could never decide between Cousin Les, who said that a sinner had to be baptized backsides forward, and Cousin Sylvester, who proved by Scripture that he is to be left in the water to soak for a while in any case.

It was the spell of the Word which caused Celia to hunt down hymn-histing sessions on the back streets of New York and Boston, and tambourine accompaniments of *Washed in the Blood of the Lamb* sung in the throbbing Caribbean dialects of Spanish Harlem. And it was the pull of the Word that finally brought us together on New York's East Side one spring day in 1941.

Our first date, made an hour afterward, was to take in the Friday night service of the Pentecostal Sabbath Keepers who met in a storefront chapel on Fourteenth Street and Avenue A. But a gangster killed his moll up in the Bronx that Friday and Harold was sent to the morgue to view the corpse during the evening.

This was unfortunate, even from the professional point of view. For the Pentecostal Sabbath-Keeping saints got happy that night and marched down Fourteenth Street to the East River singing "Sunday Ain't No Day of Mine" until storekeepers began phoning in for the riot squad.

"One day we'll write a book about the little sects." It was Celia who said it first, a few weeks after our first meeting. "And if I marry you I'll probably spend eternity with them instead of with Reb Fyva."

This is the book, the fulfillment of a promise we made ourselves while we were sparking over a song book at a revival held in, of all places, a Holiness tabernacle at Coney Island. It has been a joint undertaking, but we have used the pronoun "I" interchangeably, whichever one of us happened to be writing a particular chapter. The "I," however, is always identified in the context of the chapter so that the reader may not be confused.

We are grateful not only to our personal friends who have given us help in preparing the manuscript, but also to our friends of the little sects who, out of the warmth in their hearts, have invited us into their homes and churches, to their baptisms and footwashings, marriages and funerals. In their kindness to us they have given us a deeper understanding of something that is said in the Word: "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."



## SANCTIFIED FOLKS





## CHAPTER I

### COUNTRY OF THE WORD

We woke early on that May morning to the tune of our train rolling rhythmically along the tracks. There was impatience at the pit of my stomach, the kind of feeling you get when you know it can't be long now. Surely we ought to be rolling into Tennessee.

Our baby kicked his little legs and whimpered for his breakfast. I rang for the porter.

"Will you please warm the baby's milk bottle?" And then, "Are we in Tennessee yet?"

"No'm. But the next stop is Bristol and the line runs right down the tracks."

"Thank you," I said, rather too intensely, as if he had made me a gift of the opportunity to come back home. I thumped at the top berth and called to Harold to get up.

"Hurry and dress. We're pulling into Tennessee."

Harold laughed, a little knowing laugh, but got into his clothes and eased down. I was already dressed and waiting for the porter. When he came with the baby's bottle, the window shades were up and I was stretched across my berth taking in the landscape.

"Here it is, ma'am." The porter handed me the bottle wrapped neatly in a snowy white Pullman towel. Harold picked up the baby and we moved to a seat across the aisle to let the porter make up our berths.

"It's seventeen years," I thought aloud. The porter turned and gave me a warm smile.

"It's mighty good to see your own country. I live down here in Knoxville."

Harold and I moved back to our section. The baby lay on

a pillow and held his bottle up high, unmindful of the bumps and jerks, or more likely enjoying the motion. Harold and I gazed through the window at the puffs of white cloud sailing over Virginia pastures, over unpainted little shacks—always neighbors to railroad tracks—and over unmindful cows grazing thoughtfully in the early morning.

"He's the first Preece to be born a Yankee in three hundred years," Harold said, pointing to Hillel David.

"Yes, but he'll cut his teeth on more than one brush arbor meeting and baptizing in his mother's home state," I answered.

The train had pulled out of Bristol and was gathering speed ahead. The rolling hills were an undulating wave of all shades of green.

"Fine country for stills," Harold said, motioning toward the hills.

"As good as Bull Creek, Texas," I teased.

The porter came by. "First call for breakfast! Dining coach two cars ahead!" He stopped by me and said, "We're just pulling into East Tennessee now. That's God's country."

I beamed. We passed a brushy patch overhung with wild grapevines. "A natural for a brush arbor meeting," Harold remarked.

"You'll probably find one before the baby is parked and the bags are unpacked," I said.

"Now there was Brother Dee," he mused. "Can't remember whether he was from the Smokies or the Cumberlands. Never will forget his revival meeting at the Church of Jesus of Nazareth, Incorporated, in the Turtle Bend community just out of Houston. That must have been a good twelve years ago.

"What a sermon he preached one night! Telling folks not to have any more babies because the world was coming to an end and the little ones would all burn up in Hell anyhow.

"Well, seven weeks later Aggie Fay, Aunt Rosie Wright's girl, came up with a pair of twins that looked exactly like

Brother Dee. Brother Dee left Texas just the way he'd come into it—two jumps ahead of a shotgun as he hit the Louisiana line. I wonder where the old cuss would be now?"

"I see you've got a good start," I answered and we both laughed.

For the next four hours we rolled over the better part of my long state with its precious memories of growing-up years—possum hunts and camping, nutting and bird trips. We reached our stopping point—a little town in the Cumberland—about eleven. The town's one taxi took us two miles out in the hills to the log cabin that our friend, a fellow writer, had rented for us.

And there she stood—our friend—on the front porch to welcome us, a lunch basket covered with a blue and white checkered cloth on her arm. May Justus has written many a book about these hills, and we felt warm inside that she was to be our neighbor.

Here we were back in the Country of the Word in this little log cabin built long before the Civil War and set deep in the woods. This was to be our home for the next two years. Under a giant oak tree in the back yard we built a long table of rough planks that was to serve us over the long dry summer for work on weekdays and picnics on Sundays.

Many a time May would slip in, unheard and unseen, like a mountain elf, with a jar of lemonade, a bowl of poke sallet or a basket of fresh greens from her garden. We'd just find her gifts parked before lunch on the front porch.

Many a mountain young-un, taking a short cut through our woods, would stop to peep over our shoulders to see how the writin' machine (as the hill people called our typewriter) prints up a book.

Our near neighbor across the field, Aunt Tut, came over to get acquainted and to welcome us as soon as we were settled. She appeared very early one morning with a jar full of canned pickled pears in her hand.

"I jest found these and thought they'd look good on empty shelves," she explained as she walked into the kitchen.

"You'll stay and have breakfast with us," Harold invited.

"No, thank you. I done et."

"Well, you've got to have a bite with us," Harold insisted. We sat down to plates of bacon and eggs with plenty of hominy grits on the side.

"Honey, this is good," Harold declared, diving in. "Grits. This is my country."

"No, brother, it's mine," I said.

"Don't know about that. My mother's great-grandfather, old Cap'n John Phillips, was the first settler down here in Giles County. There ought to be plenty of my kin around Pulaski."

"Well, son," Aunt Tut said, "I reckon we'll be mighty proud to own you."

We swapped talk. May had already told Aunt Tut that we were writing folks. It wasn't long before we realized that May had paved the way so that we were accepted by this homely community where everybody is kin or cross-kin to everybody else.

"If you folks ain't a-writin tomorrow night," she said, "I'd be mighty proud to take you all to the revival in the United Baptist Church. Even if we don't do nothin but wash out the doins of that ornery Dee Tucker, hit'll be a sight to the Lord."

Harold choked. "Aunt Tut, you don't mean that long, skinny Dee Tucker with his big Adam's apple and curly red hair that falls over his right eye when he preaches!"

I barked Harold's shin so hard under the table that he winced.

"The Adam's apple is the same," muttered Aunt Tut, "but the hair's done turned gray and the Devil in him is turned blacker'n the Hell he's a-goin to."

"I put in a good word fer him to git the United Church to hold his revival in, and he takes up with Sister Edith, what

with her man, Brother Clarence, bein head of the deacon board.

"All the fine folks from town been a-flockin to the meetins, even the Methodist ladies what done put ever cent their menfolks make in worldly show. You see, the Devil done give ol Dee Tucker a mighty smooth tongue to fool folks.

"Well, jest day fore yesterday there was ol Dee Tucker a-wallerin out in the ditch in front of Cousin Marion's general store a-cussin drunk and a-hollerin Sister Edith's name so you could a-heerd him from here to Holy Water. Brother Clarence what done kilt one man over Sister Edith lit out home fer his shotgun. Cousin Marion didn't want no killin in front of his store so he had Constable Jim Earl carry him off. Jim Earl done took him to Jellico jail."

Harold sat tense in his chair and I could see what was running through his mind. I turned to Aunt Tut and promised that we would go to the revival with her—it would be not only to hear the Word in the Cumberlands but also to restore the prestige of a neighbor with her deacon board.

And so here we were. The sun beat down on the hills and valleys, drying up the fruit of the fields and the water in the wells. But the latter rain of grace foretold in the Word poured down on the countryside, baptizing the saints with the blessings of the Spirit.

My husband took a walk across a couple of hollows to see Constable Jim Earl.

## CHAPTER II

### A SECT IS BORN

"You've got to come and have Sunday dinner with us sometime, Constable," I said to Jim Earl as the old Chevvy rattled toward Jellico jail.

"Yes sir, you've not tasted the real thing till you've tasted Celia's blackberry cobbler," Harold put in.

"That's mighty fine of you all," Jim Earl acknowledged. "But why in kingdom come would a God-fearin man want to take his good wife to the jail house to see old toad-foot Dee Tucker? Tain't a Christian thing to do—a good woman goin to a jail house."

The Constable kept up the one-sided dispute as we bumped along Main Street. He made a sharp turn to the left and the car began to climb a washed-out, rocky dirt road.

"Them Republican road commissioners'll let you cut yore tires plumb to pieces fore they'll sprinkle a handful of gravel on these here roads. Ain't got no use fer that ol sympathetic rubber we been gittin count of the war," he grumbled as his tires grated on the sharp stones.

Off at a right angle stood the small fire house. Before we had turned the corner and caught sight of the solid red brick jail, we heard the rumbling of an old hymn that is one of my favorites—"Life Is like a Mountain Railroad."

Harold winked at me and I winked back. Jim Earl pulled up and brought the car to a jerky halt. I got out first and hummed the last lines:

"Keep your hand upon the throttle,  
And your eye upon the rail."

"A fine place fer a lady to come visitin." The constable was still rankled, but he pulled out his impressive bunch of keys and carefully selected the right one.

The heavy iron door swung open and we walked in. We blinked, trying to adjust our eyes to the dim, foul-smelling corridor after leaving the bright May sunshine outside.

"It's that third one over to the left," Jim Earl scowled. "That's the fourth time I done kep him here. Reckon there ain't a jail house in Tennessee that ain't bedded an boarded ol Dee Tucker."

We stood in front of the caged door to the bull pen. And we saw a sight that we were never to forget.

A tall, gaunt figure stood in the only spot of sunlight coming through a narrow barred window. That little splotch of sun was a halo around his head, magnifying the blazing brown eyes lit up with the fire of the Word. A shock of wavy gray hair tumbled down his forehead and over his right eye. Sharp, high cheekbones climbed on either side of his hooked nose. "He's got a drop of Indian blood like so many of the poor whites in the South—including Harold," I thought.

The pointed chin cut the air like a butcher knife as Brother Dee poured out the Word to the seven bundles of rags sitting on the floor.

"Now, brothers," Dee Tucker exhorted, "there ain't no tellin who the Lord done chose to show His signs in Heaven to."

"Amen!" The seven heads wagged. "No tellin who!"

"An there ain't no tellin where that place is that He's a-gone to show His signs at," Brother Dee bellowed, banging his fist in the hollow of his palm.

"Amen! Ain't no tellin where."

"Didn't He show them signs back in the ol days at Pentecost when ever man heerd the Gospel bein preached in his own kind of talk? Bless God! They was jest a-standin round listenin to them a-pos-tuls a-preachin the Word in their kind of talk. But ever last one of em knowed what them a-pos-tuls was a-talkin about."

"Praise God! Ever last one of em."

"Didn't the early rain come splashin down when the Lord poured out His sperrit back in them olden days at Pentecost?"

"Yes sir, Lord! Come splashin down."

"Ain't the latter rain gone to splash down like a gulley-wash fore He comes back an takes His children way up there in them clouds?"

"Hallelujah! Gone to come down like a gulley-wash."

"Didn't the Lord say that He was gone to bring dee-*liv*-erance to them what was put in jail houses fer His name?"

"Yes sir! Gone to bring dee-*liv*-erance."

"Didn't ol Brother Zekiel see them four wheels of God a-carryin up the creatures of God what done been in captivity? Yes sir, brothers! Ol Zekiel done seen the sign just like us saints that's done got locked up in Jellico jail house been seein signs. Can't no sheriffs lock up a bunch of saints away from the signs of the Lord."

"Hallelujah, brother! Can't lock em up. Hallelujah, the ol sheriff can't do that!"

"Didn't them sheriffs back in olden times lock up Paul and Silas in that there jail house at Philippi? Didn't the Lord—hallelujah! oh glory!—send down that there earthquake to bust down the jail-house doors?"

"Amen! Busted the jail-house doors."

Brother Dee grabbed the bars of the cage door and started tugging at them. The seven saints jumped up, screaming, howling and yelling hallelujah. They began kicking at the stone walls. One squat man with a bullet head butted his head half a dozen times against the heavy iron bars of a side window until he reeled back in a stupor and sat down groggily on the floor.

Brother Dee and the other six were shouting, "Bust em down now, Lord. Hallelujah, bust em down!"

Harold and I thought we were going to see a sanctified jail-break. But Brother Dee raised his eyes and saw us standing by



the door. He clapped his hands a couple of times and his partners quieted down.

"Brothers," he said, "don't be a-frettin. The Lord is a-gone to come down Hissself and pick up these ol iron doors like He'd pick up a rooster feather. Jes now He's done sent us two folks fer a sign that He's comin."

"Amen! Amen!" was the subdued answer.

Jim Earl hesitated about opening the cage door for us. But I turned away and did not see Harold slip something into his hand. Then the door swung open and shut again, with the constable waiting on the outside until we should be ready to go.

Brother Dee swept toward us with his arms outstretched. Turning to his converts standing back at a respectable distance, he cried, "Hallelujah, brothers, here they is! The Lord's done sent down His emisarries. He's done done it."

The saved law-breakers eyed us with wonder and awe. We stood there as surprised and astonished as anybody in that bull pen.

Brother Dee wrapped his arms around Harold's shoulders and looked him in the eyes. "Now I place you, brother," he declaimed. "Ain't you that young writin feller that wrote all them ar-tickles about my revival meetin back there in Turtle Bend right outside of Houston?"

"That's right, Brother Dee," Harold answered, surprised at such a storehouse memory. "I want you to meet my wife. I married a writin woman."

"If the Lord don't take me afore, I'll be a-gettin out of here come Thursday. An," Brother Dee sighed, "I ain't got no place to lay my head."

"Why, you come right on out to our place." Harold invited him before I knew what was coming next.

I was cross on the way home. "If Aunt Tut finds out that Dee Tucker is coming to our place," I said, "I'll be leaving

Tennessee the way he left Texas—and for another seventeen years.”

“Why, you don’t know what you’re talking about,” Harold argued. “That man, Dee Tucker, is a walking history of every Holiness cult in this country. I’ll bet he’s preached in every one of them—from Savannah to Seattle—in the Pentecostal Holiness Church, the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church of God of the Americas, the Holiness Methodist Church, the Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church, the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, the Last Days Church of God, the Church of God as Organized by Christ—with probably side excursions into the Church of Daniel’s Band and the Church of God (Apostolic).”

“In that case, I’d say Brother Dee is a book in himself,” I answered.

“Maybe he is,” Harold agreed.

Next Thursday, Dan, the iceman, dumped one of the strangest loads ever deposited at my door. Dan walked in front with the usual fifty-pound block of ice. Right behind him three men danced and wiggled, whooped and shouted. I knew that for a familiar sight in these hills. Sometimes the men were likkered up. Sometimes the Spirit had got them, and they were in the Glory Way like these three bawling:

“Hallelujah, one, two, three,  
Us is saved an us is free,  
Jesus loves us, praise His name!  
We’s His children an ain’t ashamed.”

I recognized Brother Dee right away, and hurriedly called to Harold, who came running from the back yard. I cast an uneasy glance across the field toward Aunt Tut’s and motioned Harold to take them inside the cabin.

Brother Dee kissed and pawed Harold like a sweetheart.

“He’s done saved us, praise His name! Brother Preece, I

want you to meet Brother Al Yancey an Brother Cleve Mankin. They done got the call down there in Jellico jail house.

"Us three done got sent to jail cause we didn't do what the Word said bout the Lord's saints gittin out of them worldly churches what's fell an lost the Sperrit. Brother Yancey, here, backslid out of the New Testament Church of God but still went wunst in a while jest to socialize with his kinfolks. Brother Mankin hung round that Original Church of God down in Chatty-noogy an you see what he got fer it. I used to preach in the Last Days Church of God till ol Bishop Tomlinson got up in General Convention an cused me fore all the brothern of spendin tithe money. Now us three is startin up the Sanctified Church of God, cause we's all been washed clean in the latter rain so we'd be pure and sanctified from the world."

Harold had taken them into the cabin and perched himself in the big armchair. "Brother Dee," he asked, "I never could understand why the Holiness denominations keep breaking up and splitting into so many new little churches."

"Son, they's all done gone the way of the world with a snuffbox in their mouth an dancin in their feet. All cept the Sanctified Church of God. Yes sir, the Lord done called Dee Tucker to be the bishop of His come-out church. An if the Devil ever starts messin round it to split it up, Bishop Dee Tucker'll chase him back to Hell with his own pitchfork."

Brother Dee leaned back in his chair and half closed his eyes. "Back there when I was a young buck," he said, "the latter rain was fallin down, washin the snuff off of mouths of the saints and the sin out of their hearts.

"Back in them days, me and ol Brother Seymour an the rest of them what got the call was a-hopin fer a mighty fine crop of souls ree-deemed and foller'n the Word. But whata we got now? Nothin but a pore patch of tarnip greens what

ain't got no bottoms. The Devil done got in an et up them roots an all they makes now is jest some green tops. Tha's all—jest some green tops."

"Now, son," Brother Dee's voice was soft, just as it is when he calls sinners to come home at the brush arbor meetings, "if you'll tell yore woman to cook up a mess of them green tops that I spotted a-growin in yore tarnip patch, I'll tell you how the saints done started out an the Devil done finished up."

### CHAPTER III

## FALLING OF THE LATTER RAIN

"Behold, the husbandman waiteth fer the precious fruit of the earth and hath long patience fer it till he receive the early and latter rain." As he concluded, Brother Dee stuck a biscuit on his fork and scraped it back and forth across his plate, sopping up the last drop of gravy.

Brother Yancey ran his tongue around his lips and did the circle with a loud smack. "Sister Preece, that was a mighty fine dinner," Brother Mankin complimented Celia. "Shore taste good when a feller's et beans and lasses fer thirty days on a stretch."

Brother Dee's Adam's apple made its last motion as he swigged down a glass of buttermilk. "Makes me think of what Brother Charlie Jernigan done fed me back there in Texas when I jest got the call to preach the Word," he said. "Ever hear tell of them Jernigans back where you come from, Brother Harold?"

"Yeh," I answered. "There was a sassy little gal by the name of Gladys Jernigan who was in the third grade with me."

"Musta been kinfolks," Brother Dee said nodding. "Brother Charlie Jernigan allus claimed you couldn't flush a sinner like you flush a quail—quiet and shylike. 'A sinner's a-hidin out from the Lord jest like a quail's hidin out from the hunter,' he used to tell us young preachers a-spreadin the Word back there in the In-dee-pen-dunt Holiness Church. 'No sir, you got to come up on them sinners right sassylike,' ol Brother Charlie used to say. 'Tha's the onliest way you'll ever git the aim on em to shoot them bullets of God's love straight into a sinner's heart.'"

Brother Dee ran his hand reminiscently across the wiry gray stubble on his chin. I kicked Celia under the table to make her keep quiet. There was an unholy twinkle in Brother Dee's eyes as he belched with contentment over the meal and continued the saga of Charlie Jernigan.

"Only trouble was, Brother Harold, them bullets that was a-pintin at me when I crost the Red River an hit Texas wasn't no bullets of love. No sir! Them was gunshells that you coulda clipped a mule's head off with. Them half-breeds over in the Cherokee nation—what they used to call Injun Territory—was a-fannin my britches whole time my pony was a-swimmin lickety-split acrost Red River with me keepin my head ducked down low on the saddle.

"Yes sir! I knowed how them children of Israel musta felt when they was hittin acrost the Red Sea with Ol Man Pharaoh tearin like thunder behind em. An I was as happy to git acrost the Red River as them children of Israel was to git crost the Red Sea.

"Now, the Devil done set them Injuns agin me on count I'd jest been saved an called to pro-claim the Word. The Devil done got em riled up cause I was a-leavin that Injun woman I'd been layin up in sin with—scuse me, Sister Preece—an her with a young-un a-comin. More I studied an prayed bout it, more I seen I couldn't feed the bread of life to sinners ef I had to fool away my time rustlin up bread fer a young-un con-ceeded in sin an shaped in i-ni-qui-ty." Brother Dee pronounced the last word with a camp-meeting twang.

"I'd done got under the blood when Uncle Bud Robinson come through the Injun Territory holdin Holiness meetins an provin by the Word that the Sperrit done left all them big rich churches like the Baptist an Methodist. The rich folks with them smart-talkin, edjucated preachers an them iceboxes they called churches used to laugh at Uncle Bud an what they called 'that new, sanctified preacher.' They'd ride up in them fine big surreys to make fun of them what was saved in ol-

fashioned Holy Ghost revivals. They'd make fun when pore folks got the Sperrit an started shoutin an dancin. The Word says, 'Make a joyful noise unto the Lord.' They'd cut up an make fun till Uncle Bud'd git mad, open up the Word an start readin bout whited se-pulch-res. Fer that they run him out of town.

"But you couldn't run Uncle Bud anywhere he didn't have a notion of goin. You see, I knowed bout Uncle Bud long fore I got into a little scrape bout a sinner woman what had a husband, an lit out of Tennessee fer the Injun Territory. His dad run liquor with my dad fer a while over there in White County fore his dad lit out of Tennessee fer Texas. Yes sir, them Robinsons was a powerful hard lot till the Sperrit hit em an shook the livin stuffin out of em.

"Now, Uncle Bud was kind of flicted jest like a lot of saints who got their bones straight an their souls washed when the latter rain started splashin down on this here hell-bent ol world. He was what you might call fittified when he was a-growin up, but his ma never would let none of them smart doctors send him to one of them epilectic homes.

"It was jest bout the time of the Spanish-American War that he hit Injun Territory. Many a night, he'd be standin up in the pull-pit a-shoutin 'Glory!' Then he'd keel over an start kickin an twitchin. Well, us saints'd hallelujah till the dogs, two miles away, started tunin up to howl. Uncle Bud'd jest lay there a-foamin at the mouth as purty as you please. Then, dreckly, the saints'd start fallin off them benches an down to the ground. Some nights a whole cong-re-gation'd git smit with the Sperrit like that an lay there all night long. That was the way they got the second baptizin of the Sperrit. The first baptizin was of water with the saints comin up shoutin. The second baptizin was of the Sperrit with the saints goin down shoutin. An that second baptizin was the sign that the Lord was a-pourin out His Sperrit in these here latter days, jest like it says He was in the Word.

"The first baptizin meant you was saved an the second baptizin meant you was sanctified. But them rich folks' churches didn't wanta have nothin to do with folks that got sanctified. So the sanctified folks jest had to start churches that would foller the Lord an His Word. They jest had to come out of them fallen churches with them whited se-pulchres a-thinkin that livin fer Jesus through a-ternity meant dressin up fer Jesus on Sunday.

"Now, I ain't never had no more clo'es cept jest what I wore on my back. It was forty-three year ago today—fifteenth day of May in the year 1900—an I was a-wearin a pair of cotton pants an a blue shirt jest like I got on now. I rid up to Brother Charlie Jernigan's house at Van Alstyne, a little piece acrost the Texas line from Injun Territory. You know that town, Brother Preece? It's in Grayson County."

"Sure," I answered. "My mother grew up in Collin County, just a few miles from Van Alstyne." Every Southern village claims one or two celebrities. Van Alstyne, in the north Texas blackland, has had a couple in its unhurried time—Holiness evangelist Charlie Jernigan in my mother's generation, and cowboy-actor Gene Autrey in mine.

"What happened at Brother Charlie's?" I asked.

"Well, I done tole him that Uncle Bud Robinson sent me cause I was called to pro-claim the Word. Then I jest sort of hinted round that I'd like to know what kind of wages he'd pay for a young preacher jest a-startin out.

"Well sir, Brother Charlie started lookin mad at me an I started swaller'n real hard. Then he waved that big hand of his an tole me off. He tole me proper.

"'Young feller,' he said, 'preachers who work with me ain't got no guarantee. They gotta know how to pull a mad bull down by the horns, pop its neck, take off its hide, stretch out the hide fer a tent where they can preach holiness, an then peddle out the meat fer a livin.

"Well sir, I figgered I was no better than them other



preachers a-beatin sinners out of them woods like they was yearlin bulls. You know how yearlins'll high-tail it fer a thicket if somebody's behind em with a brandin iron. Lots of sinners run away from the blood jest like yearlin bulls run away from the brandin iron.

"I knowed Brother Charlie was right bout them bulls cause the Lord give me a sign he was right. The Lord an Brother Charlie sent me to pastor some saints a-worshipin in a place called Calfskin. They called it that on count so many rich folks turned loose their calves to get fat there.

"Well, I looked at them calves an I membered what Brother Charlie done tole me. I took down the Word an read that 'the cattle on a thousand hills are mine, saith the Lord.' I looked round at the Lord's cattle a-runnin loose round Calfskin. Then I opened up the Word agin. There I seen, plain as daylight, that 'them what preaches the Gospel shall live by the Gospel.' Brother, I figgered out them calves by the Word an they made a heap of good sense fer a hongry preacher what was drawin no wages.

"But the Devil done got in the way agin. I was a-peddlin some calf meat, quiet as you please, when the constable there at Van Alstyne—an Constable Jim Earl makes me think of him—come up an rested me. They took me over to the courthouse at Sherman an cused me of rustlin cattle. Then they took me down to the state pen at Huntsville fer a year an a day. Don't the Word say, 'They shall cast ye in prison fer my name's sake'?

"Now, I been in a heap worse jails fer His name's sake than that there Texas pen. They never made me lay down on a blanket naked to take a whuppin like they do some of them fellers. They never made me run ahead of the bloodhounds to keep em used to trailin.

"No sir, they jest give me the run of the place when they found out that I was a Holy Ghost baptized man. An I hadn't been there long fore the latter rain started fallin right down

there on the Texas pen. I started preachin an the Lord started doin His work. Hallelujah! Sometimes the cotton pickin gang'd git so happy right out in the patch that they'd start laughin an cryin till the guards'd turn the hounds loose to chaw on em an make em git back to work.

"After I got out, I started goin to ever place where the latter rain was a-pourin down an I been doin that ever since. I reckon ol Dee Tucker's been round wherever the Lord's done sent one of them big gulleywashes that the saints talk bout whenever they git together to praise His name.

"When I got out of the Texas pen, the Lord led me out to Topeka, Kansas, where the Sperrit had come down round midnight on New Year's night in ninety-nine. Them saints at Bethel College, what was run by the Holiness folks, done waited on the Lord twenty-one days, a-prayin an a-fastin, a-wailin an a-gnashin their teeth, till the Lord done sent down the latter rain to quench their thirst.

"But the Lord sent em a new sign which I hadn't got an which I wanted to see. When He come down there in Topeka, He caused em to speak in all kinds of different languages. Sister Agnes Ozman, who was one of the main saints there in Topeka, started talkin that Bohemian tongue night after the Lord come down on New Year's. She was a-preachin in a mission there in Topeka when the Sperrit got hold of her an made her talk that language. Another Bohemian who was there stood up an trans-lay-ted it fer her.

"Well, that was a-happenin all over the country wherever the saints of God stood up an testified fer their Lord. Praise His name! It was Pentecost all over again. Down in Texas they was a-talkin Chineese an Eyetalian. Back in the Carylinas you could hear em a-testifyin in Greek an French. One Greek man who run a restaurant got saved down in Durham, North Carylina, an joined the Pentecostal Holiness Church that Brother G. B. Cashwell was a-startin up an that's still growin strong down there in them mill towns. That Greek man jest

plumb keeled over on his knees when Brother Cashwell stood up there a-preachin in his langwidge.

"Well, I prayed with them saints night after night in Topeka to git that there precious gift of tongues. Then one night the Sperrit took hold of me as I was a-preachin in Galena, Kansas, an I started cuttin loose in A-ray-bic. Next night I talked in Ro-manian, next night in Portygee.

"Mornin after that I done stopped in a Chinee laundry to git out my extra shirt. The wife was back there a-ironin clo'es. She was right purty standin up there in that kimono an the Sperrit took hold of me mighty hard when I seen her. Well, I started a-talkin a sluice to her in Chinee.

"Next thing I knowed, I was a-lyin out on the sidewalk with a big gash on my head an the blood runnin down. When the po-lice come an shoved way the crowd, that Chinaman told em I done said somep'n real bad to his wife. But I reckon it was jest the Devil a-rilin up that Chinaman jest like he riled up them half-breeds back there in the Injun Territory.

"Well, Brother Preece, I jest didnt let that faze me. I went on a-preachin fer the Pentecostal folks all over Kansas an Missouri. Then a new gift of the Sperrit come pourin down with the latter rain an folks started gittin healed of all kinds of diseases jest as they done back in Bible times.

"I saw Sister Mary Arthur, there in Galena, git healed of six diff'rent diseases at one time after we'd poured kerosene ile that we used fer healin all over her. She had dyspep-sy, pro-lapsus, piles, bowel paralysis, an a fever that made her right eye blind. She got up shoutin that she'd been to all kinds of doctors—ally-pathic doctors, homey-pathic doctors, them bone-rubbin doctors they call osty-paths, an them ol Antichrists what they call Christian Scientists. But none of em ever done her no good till Dee Tucker an the rest of the saints rubbed her good an iled her up.

"Biggest revival you ever seen broke out right there in

Sister Arthur's little shack. Crowds got so big we had to rent the biggest building in Galena. That still wasn't nough to take care of ever'body comin in from Kansas, Missouri an Oklahomy, what used to be Injun Territory, a-cryin to be healed an saved. So we staked down tents outside the buildin but I got sort of worried when Injuns started traipsin in from acrost that Oklahomy line, jest bout ten miles away.

"One night I was a-preachin the Devil down to a fare-you-well when I happened to see in that there crowd one of the brothers of that half-breed woman I done put out of my mind long ago. I knowed that was a sign the Lord done give me to move on. For ever time the latter rain done brung up a new crop the Lord shows ol Dee Tucker where it's a-sproutin.

"Well, brothers, it was a-spoutin up like young corn back in White County, down on Azusa Street, in Los Angeles, California. It was a-bein tended by a one-eyed colored preacher who come from Georgy, name of Brother W. J. Seymour. I reckon you might call him the daddy of most of the Holiness dee-nominations that's a-runnin now. There was sixty-four of em I done had truck with, an that ain't half of em. Fact is, you can find new ones jest bout ever place you go.

"Reckon I'll never put Brother Seymour out my mind an the mer-a-culs I seen there. He didn't have but one eye, an he wouldn't wear no necktie. Claimed it choked the glory when he got up to preach. But he always wore an ol brass collar button fer luck in his neckband. When he wasn't preachin or helpin sinners out at the altar, he used to set behind a couple of empty shoe-boxes turned up on their hindsides. He'd stick his head in the top box where nobody could see his face an pray an moan till the Sperrit yanked him up to preach some more.

"Brother, I believe that me bein called in Jellico jail house to start the Sanctified Church of God is a sign that we're

a-goin to see the kind of revival here in Tennessee that I seen back there in Los Angeles in 1906.

"Any hour of the day or night, from sun to sun, you could find them saints a-pourin in from all over this here country to that mission house on Azusa Street. Didn't make no difference bout color neither. Saints grabbed each other in great big hugs an then started smackin with the holy kiss. They brought their pipes an their snuffboxes an dumped em in a great big pile at the altar. Then they fetched washtubs an burnt up in them tubs all the books they had cept the Bible. When they wasn't a-doin things like that, they was a-rollin an a-tossin. Brother Seymour said they was a-gone to roll right into Heaven, an the folks that called em 'Holy Rollers' was a-gone to roll right into Hell.

"Finally, the railroads started a-runnin special trains fer the crowds of saints an sinners a-comin from ever state in the Union. Fer a while I made a livin with a hack an a bob-tailed mare, a-carryin em from the station out to the mission. Long fore the train used to git into Los Angeles them saints'd start feelin the power of the Sperrit. Then you coulda heerd em a-whoopin an a-hollerin fer miles down the track fore the train'd stop.

"Well, Brother Preece,"—and Brother Dee's voice was tired and a little bit discouraged—"tha's the way it all started fore weeds an brier patches got goin in them crops that was sprouted up by the latter rain. Right after Brother Seymour's revival they all started splittin up into diff'rent dee-nominations. Ever man who got a big name as a preacher got too big fer his britches an got too big fer God. Then he got to start his own outfit that he could run all by hisself. Purty soon it was as bad in the Holiness churches as it was in them fallen churches which us folks done split off from. No sir, tain't right. Lord never intended fer his folks to be split up into the Pentecostal Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Assemblies of

the World, the Pentecostal Holiness Church, the A-pos-tolic Faith Church, the Congregational Holiness Churches, ten outfits a-callin theirselves the Church of God, and forty-leven different kinds of saints a-believin the same things but a-goin by different names. No sir, the Devil done sneaked in with the saints an pizened the crops."

Brother Dee was silent for just a minute, and I had a vague hunch of what was coming.

"Tha's why the Lord done called me in the Jellico jail house to start the Sanctified Church of God," he said, toying with his empty glass. "It's to git all His true saints who's still a-grubbin in them weed patches back into a fresh plowed field where they can start makin a brand-new crop.

"Forty-three year ago today Brother Charlie Jernigan done fed me biscuits an turnip greens like you done fed me today. Tha's a sign fer you, Brother Preece. It's a sign that the Lord needs money to git the Sanctified Church of God a-goin. Now I know you's a Lord-fearin man who follers His signs."

I was caught between Celia's eyes, looking at me in warning, and Brother Dee's eyes, looking at me in hope. I shifted mine from Celia, took out my billfold and peeled off five singles. Brother Dee pulled out an old-fashioned pocketbook and carefully placed the bills inside.

"Reckon we'll be moseyin long now," he said rising. "Brother Yancey here done got room fer all three of us to his house, so we won't have to be wearin out our welcome here. But I'll be stoppin in plenty."

As the three went down the road singing, "Oh, it's Glory in my soul," Celia said. "There goes the gas money that was going to take us to see the snake people in Kentucky."

## CHAPTER IV

### SNAKES IN EDEN

But we did get to Kentucky and were sitting in a small town drugstore, drinking cokes with the editor of the county paper when Deputy Newt Hilton brought Uncle Pete and the snakes down the main street. The editor had told us one or two good yarns about Indian battles fought in these hills after Daniel Boone brought in the first settlers. He assured us, too emphatically, we thought, that there was no such thing as a cult of snake worshipers in this stretch of the Kentucky Cumberlands.

"Oh, a couple of damned fools swelled up and died from handling rattlers at one of those Holy Roller brush arbor revivals." He laughed. "The others got the liver scared out of em and stopped fooling with snakes. Yankee newspapermen came down and wrote so much about it that the legislature passed a law making it a crime to use snakes in church services or to hunt em down with that idea in mind. It's nothing to make you folks waste your time poking your noses round the county and maybe getting em shot off."

Then a tousle-headed kid, with jaw protruding from a wad of tobacco, banged through the front door, yelling, "Dep'ty Newt's done caught Uncle Pete Marlow with a mess of snakes an plugged him in the hand." So excited was he that his chew dropped to the freshly scrubbed pine floor as he followed the druggist and customers out to the public square. There Doc Largent, the county health officer, was examining Uncle Pete's wounded hand.

The snake catcher chewed indifferently on his scraggly brown beard as the doctor felt around his fingers, streaked black and red from a mixture of dirt and blood. Celia gasped

and colored when she heard the hissing, angry song of the imprisoned rattlers in the burlap bag hanging from Uncle Pete's free hand.

"Didn't wanta blast that hand," Deputy Newt was explaining to the Saturday afternoon crowd, "but he come at me with his snake pole when I found him pokin round that rattler den on Stovewood Mountain. With them snakes as evidence, reckon he'll be a-standin jury trial here in the court-house stead of faith trial over at the Signs Foller'n Church."

"All right, Newt, take him and his snakes over to the jail house." Doc Largent was annoyed only at being called away from his perennial checker game in Ab Yeager's barber shop. "I'll come over after I make that next move, and cut the bullet out of his hand. Damn it to hell! I swear I'll let anybody else swell up and go to the graveyard if they get bit from monkeying with snakes."

We looked for the editor, but he was nowhere in sight.

Then someone drawled, "Ef you mind the Word, don't need no smart doctor comin round rippin the guts out of folks. Lord said one of the signs foller'n them that believe would be that the saints would take up sarpints an would ree-cover." We saw a gangling mountaineer turn and walk away with long, stubborn strides. We asked who he was.

"Oh, that's ol Jeth Henderson, the Signs Foller'n preacher from back in Glory Holler," was the answer. "He's got his Scripture down pat. Claims, ef you're ever to git to your home over there, you gotta handle snakes like you foot-washes an baptizes."

Before the sun woke the buzzards and snakes roosting on Stovewood Mountain, I had filled up the gas tank and started driving along dim, backcountry roads toward Glory Holler and the cabin of Jeth Henderson. Celia had positively refused to go with me, pleading she had made a date with a Holiness healing sect which was currently curing everything from cancer to baby colic.



As my flivver bumped over rocks and washed-out draws on those narrow lanes, I speculated upon the manner in which every ancient superstition of the human race had found shelter, along with rum runners and pioneer Americans, in these far-away caves and hollows. I wondered, too, if some ancestral pull, more potent than the bite of the biggest rattler in the Cumberlands, was not bringing me to Glory Holler.

Some of my own kin had howled and wallowed in the orgies of the Great Revival, which had started at Cane Ridge, not far from here, in 1800, and continued for a generation, as it swept down that thousand-mile stretch of the Southern Appalachians. Men and women during the Great Revival had rolled and howled and flapped their arms like wings, cackled like chickens and squalled like the panthers still roaming the unfenced country. Whole packs of human beings would gather on all fours around the giant oaks and sycamores and bay until they collapsed from exhaustion. This was called "treeing the Devil."

In 1933 the snake sect had made headlines in every newspaper. A woman, bitten by a copperhead at one of the Sunday orgies, had, at last, passed out in convulsions. Although kicking and groaning with pain, she had steadily refused to let a doctor treat her. "I'd ruther die a-trustin the Lord than live in sin by havin the Devil send one of hisn to make me well."

Finally, after ten years, I had managed to get down to Kentucky to learn something about this most primitive of all the strange mountain cults.

I guess the Lord was looking out for poor sinners with Kentucky blood in their veins on that Sabbath morning. The sun was pushing nine o'clock when I saw a man standing in the road a hundred yards ahead of me. I pulled the brakes, and Jeth Henderson started walking toward me.

Jeth put his bare foot on the fender and peered earnestly into my face. I swear his eyes were sly and beady like a

snake's. I wanted to turn my head from those eyes, but the muscles of my neck were frozen. In that moment I felt something of the hypnotic spell which snakes are supposed to cast on the birds they charm. When Jeth Henderson smiled, his teeth seemed shiny and needle-pointed, like the fangs of a snake. When his tongue quickly licked his whiskered chin, I thought of a rattler shooting out its forked tongue before it strikes.

"Same nose, same face," Jeth's voice had the crackling sound a snake makes when it crawls across dry leaves. "You're the feller the Lord showed me in a vision when I was a-prayin out in that patch of moss a minute ago. The Lord says to me, He says, 'Jeth, go out an meet that brother what's a-sarchin fer you. Let im see the signs foller'n them that believe. Show him My workins an power when I calls My chillern together.'"

Then the old rascal commanded briskly, "Move over, young feller, an let's git goin to the Lord's house. He's spectin you at his love feast an faith trial." Jeth got in and, after I had put my foot on the starter, told me a little bit about the history of this strange cult.

Shortly after the first World War, he said, a preacher of one of the many sects calling itself the Church of God had begun "sarmonizin that saved folks had to pick up snakes to show that they trusted the Lord's promises." The preacher had not known how to read the Bible from which he preached what the other Holiness folk called "that there snake doctrine." His wife, who had done this reading while he preached down there in Tennessee, had deserted him when the Church of God had expelled him for bringing six-foot pine rattlers into his services.

Then he wandered up to the Kentucky coal country, backslid, started making moonshine, and eventually found himself a convict in a county road gang. The guards made him a trusty, only to have him escape across the line into West

Virginia where he "got restored to the Lord when he married a big fat lady saint who could read better'n that first woman." The brother had again started preaching the snake doctrine; congregations of the Signs Foller'n people now existed in Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee and North Carolina. "We never bothered to count em," Jeth answered when I asked him how many members the cult had. "The Lord keeps all the figgers in Heaven."

Jeth was silent a moment, then changed the subject briefly. "Preece," he murmured. "We've got a preacher by name of Jason Preece over at Grassy Run. Reckon he's some kin to you?"

"Reckon he is," I answered.

I was glad the rocks and washouts in the road forced me to drive at a slow pace, giving me a chance to question Jeth about the history of this cult of backwoodsmen, as quick on the Bible as they are said to be on the trigger. With all my years of poking around among outlandish religious groups, I was surprised to learn there are two distinct and mutually hostile snake sects, Jeth's Signs Following cult and the Holiness Faith Healers, who have been in the papers for their orgies up and down Powell's River in Virginia. Their preacher, Johnnie Hensley, had forfeited the Lord's protection by sinfully taking a defense job at La Follett, Tennessee, and then died of snake bites.

All the snake people had belonged to one group when they started out, Jeth told me. Two of the many free-lance Holy Roller preachers, unconnected with any of the established Holiness sects, had wandered through the mountains warning that the end of time was at hand. Nobody, they said, could ascend from the hills of Kentucky to the hills of Paradise "less'n he obeyed the whole Gospel" and heeded "the signs foller'n" which meant handling snakes.

But the two founders of the cult had fallen out when one accused the other of heresy, saying his rival was using snakes

made harmless by having their fangs pulled out. "That was the blackest lie any cussed jackleg ever stewed up down thar in Hell," growled Jeth, defender of the unblemished orthodoxy of the Signs Following people. "That other feller just wanted ever cent the deacons tuk in the hat, so he led off a lot of saints who didn't know no better an started what he calls the Holiness Faith Healers. I got rid of my ol lady when she started makin eyes at one of their preachers. Us Signs Foller'n folks calls em the Helliness Fake Peelers. When we gits to the church house, you'll see ef we fixes up them snakes to make em like pieces of string."

We had driven about five miles when I sniffed a strange, sickly odor, more heady than the smell of the early autumn flowers blooming on the hills. Jeth grinned, like a coon dog on a hot scent, when he saw that my nostrils were twitching.

"Somebody's let his watermelons or cucumbers spoil in the field," I managed to say.

Then my stomach rocked and I held frantically to the wheel as Jeth answered, "Snakes allus smell like melons when they git narvous and penned up."

I started to make some kind of reply, but the words died on my lips when a sudden, terrifying noise throbbed into my eardrums and ascended over the hills like the sound of a thousand steam pipes in eruption.

"Snakes allus start singin like a choir when I git close to the church house," Jeth shouted above the din.

The rocks and trees were a hazy blur from the noise and smell when I stopped the car in front of the split-log, shingle-roofed Signs Following church. Big, shaggy hands clutched my weak and clammy ones as we got out and Jeth began introducing me around.

I shook every hand and mumbled greetings from a dry and hollow throat. The faces of the mountaineers were common enough in these hills, and I paid little attention to

them. My eyes were fixed with a deadly fascination on the slimy, hissing, odorous snakes imprisoned in a dozen screen-topped boxes placed under the big live oak trees on the church grounds.

Sullen pine rattlers and sleek, lumbering diamond backs reared their heads. A big fellow, almost six feet long, gave me an insolent, calculating stare as he uncoiled. I was staring back when a venerable patriarch with dirty gray hair hanging to his shoulders cautiously lifted the top of a box which housed three hissing rattlers. He tilted a small wire cage which he held in his right hand and let three terrified, squeaking rats slide into the box. Each snake clamped his jaws around a rat, doomed to remain alive for hours as the deadly fangs and long sinuous body gradually expanded to devour the prey.

"One apiece fer you beauties." The old man might have been speaking affectionately to a child as he replaced the lid. "We'll jest let you fill up yer craw till next meetin time. Nothin like rat meat to slick ye up like a pair of patent-leather shoes."

I turned my back to escape the squealing of the tortured, pitiful rats. Then somebody rang the church bell, and the mountaineers shuffled off to a place where some tables had been set. The patriarch touched my shoulder. "Dinner time, brother," he said. "Let's go eat the love feast."

Gaunt, barefooted women, dressed in shapeless gingham and calico, brought out heaped-up plates of a tender meat, chopped in fine pieces, along with big, thick cups of a liquid that smelled suspiciously like mountain corn liquor. I nibbled the meat after the fashion of my hosts.

Jeth regarded me from the head of the table and chuckled. "Ye'll be smarter'n ye ever was, son, fer eatin that meat. The Word says the Lord's chillern's gotta be as gentle as doves an as wise as sarpints. Now, rale Christians is gentle like

doves when the Lord takes em an stops em from sinnin. But they don't never git wise like sarpints ef they don't eat sarpints' flesh."

I sputtered and reached for my cup. The liquid burned my throat as I heard Jeth's gloating voice. "Now, young feller, ef ye'll jest take nother swig of that juice, we'll go in an start the faith trial."

I drained the cup obediently and staggered behind my hosts into the strangest church I had ever seen in all my years of visiting America's little sects.

Empty snake skins, shed by the rattlers at molting time in August, hung as thick as spider webs from rows of rusty nails extending around the four walls. Freshly dried skins of snakes slaughtered at the love feasts were tacked lengthwise along the upper part of the walls, just below the rafters. A huge stuffed snake hung by the tail from a fishing cord a few feet over the pulpit. A chipped bowl on the rock altar was heaped high with snake rattles, and back of the pulpit hung a large, crudely drawn picture of a lamb trampling on a snake, this cult's version of that ancient symbolism which portrays Christ as destroying Satan.

The snake-catching tools were piled near the door. I saw long poles with fishhooks at the end to grab the snake in the middle of his body, thus forcing him to curl around the pole before being hoisted into the sack. There were little nooses made of cord and heavy wrapping twine, bags, boxes and yards of wire screen to enclose the boxes.

"Best time to catch em," one of the saints remarked to me as I fingered a lasso, "is in March when they're wakin up after their winter's nap, an in August when they go blind fer a spell."

I sat down on one of the backless wooden benches as Jeth mounted the pulpit and started a jazzy Holiness hymn, sung by members of a dozen backwoods sects. The saints

took up the tune, pounding their bare feet and rocking their lean arms:

"Oh, the Devil, he's a sly old fox,  
But he won't git me any more.  
If I had him here, I'd put him in a box,  
But he won't git me any more.  
Oh, he won't git me any more.  
No, he won't git me any more.  
He had me wunst,  
He had me twict,  
But he won't git me any more."

As they started a second time, a woman shut her eyes and screamed piercingly. The old patriarch shook his white mane and yelled, "Cut—cut—cut!" A toothless, old crone with snuff running from her mouth grabbed me by the neck and dribbled kisses on my face and lips. Jeth roared, "Bless God, here come the boys bringing the Devil in a box!"

I pulled loose from the old woman and turned to see a dozen young fellows marching down the aisle, each carrying a box of snakes in his hand. There were groans and cries from the congregation as a dozen other people started crawling on their bellies toward the pulpit.

A girl with stringy black braids dragging to the floor lead the parade. "Oh, Lord, here I come low-down an mean like a snake. I been a-layin out again with men in Glory Holler. But this time I means to go all the way with you, dear Lord. Try me, Oh Lord. Try me!"

The mercy-seekers inched their way to the pulpit, some of them hissing and striking out with their tongues as their teeth bit into the sides of the benches. Alternately contracting and expanding their muscles like rattlers inching along in the woods, they crawled upon the platform and started dribbling at the mouth as they raised themselves on their hands and looked down on the boxes of snakes. The congregation kept up an accompaniment, "Try em, try em,

blessed Lord! Try em what's backslidden. Try em what's comin fer the first time. Oh, Lord, Lord, give em the sign. *Ga blug karwa jah mo.*"

The Unknown Tongue, spoken in that high-pitched old Saxon inflection of the hills, praised the Snake as once it had praised Wotan in the ancestral forests. Was it Jeth Henderson or a priest of Wotan who savagely ripped open boxes of snakes with his heavy hands? Was it a man of our skeptical age or some old shaman let loose from purgatory, who caught a snarling, angry serpent by its tail and waved it around and around over his head till the snake's head slipped off to the floor below?

Jeth's hips quivered in a sinuous, twisting dance as he moved toward the girl with the black braids. He stepped over the snakes swarming on the platform and over the penitents, grabbing the serpents with their bare hands and crooning to them eerie lullabies in the Unknown Tongue. The girl was now standing erect with her eyes half closed and her body shaking in quick, convulsive tremors. Her chest swayed back till her round, big breasts burst the buttons of her cheap sweater.

Jeth's hand darted down and came up with a frightened snake. The girl moaned like a trollop in the arms of some buck from Glory Holler when Jeth wrapped the snake around her neck. Then I saw the snake strike once, twice, and a third time on her flushed cheeks, the blood spurting out in twenty places from the needle-like wounds. She grabbed the snake by the tail, held it by the back of its blunt head and kissed it lovingly from its skull to its buzzing rattles.

"It's the sign of Eve!" I heard the old patriarch shout. "Glory be, glory be, she's got the mercy sign!" said the old crone, grabbing me by the hand and forcing it around her wrinkled neck. "*Ei yah kem hun!*" the saints began screaming in the Unknown Tongue. I pulled my hand loose from



the old woman's neck, and she fell flat on the floor, where she lay threshing around between the benches. Then Jeth grabbed the girl who had been bitten and led her directly beneath the stuffed snake hanging over the pulpit.

"Look upon the snake like the chillern of Israel did in the desert, sister," he howled, "an twon't no harm come to you! Oh, thank you, Lord, fer givin us the sign."

The girl looked for a long minute at the snake, then fell over on the floor as her face began to swell.

"Now, saints," Jeth yelled, "them sign critters is startin crawling down the aisle. Pick em up an testify fer the Word. Oh, hallelujah, hallelujah!"

I felt something brushing my trouser leg and looked down to see a diamond back poising himself to strike. My face was bathed in a cold sweat when I climbed over benches, ran out to my car and stepped on the starter.

The next morning I learned through gossip that the girl was not the only one who had been bitten before the faith trial ended. But all the victims were back at their daily chores and the girl herself had last been seen slipping off into a mossy patch of woods with Jeth Henderson.

One can only guess why there are only eight recorded deaths among all the snake worshipers. The rattler venom could be neutralized by the mountain moonshine, commonly referred to as "snake medicine." Perhaps in excitement the body manufactures an antidote. Doctors say most victims die of fright and not of the poison, and perhaps city folk would survive snake bite if they knew the snakes as well as these mountaineers. Doc Largent has treated many cowardly cultists who came to him for snake bite, and these were, of course, excommunicated by their brethren. But Doc Largent swears many more get well without his help and, leaning over his checkerboard, adds, "That makes things a lot easier on me."

## CHAPTER V

### HEALIN ON BLACKBERRY MOUNTAIN

Our housekeeper, Allie Watkins, came in tired and bedraggled one morning after we got back from Kentucky. She barely pushed the broom across the floor, and I saw that something was the matter.

"Allie," I said, "you look like you've hardly had a wink of sleep."

"That's the Lord's truth, Mis' Preece. I ain't. Pore lil Georgie's been sick all night. He might near burnt up with fever. That pore chile's been punin mighty bad here lately."

I suggested that she take the afternoon off and carry the baby to the doctor. She glared at me.

"No, ma'am!" she exploded. Then a glow filled her eyes. "Next week is annual convention of the Church of God at Blackberry Mountain," she said softly. "I'm a-takin my pore ol crippled man an all the chillern, an the saints'll see they git healed with prayer."

"Don't the Word say, if any be sick among you, to call the elders of the church an anint ye with ile? Us saints in the Church of God takes the whole Word an not jest the part that suits us, like the folks in them there fallen churches. We takes it fer the healin of our bodies an the savin of our souls."

"I didn't want to put in when you called that there doctor to take the crick out of Mr. Preece's neck. But, Mis' Preece, them what trusts in the Lord an calls on His name gits healed thout no doctors."

I argued no further, but told her to go home to her ailing child.

Sister Allie didn't show up for work next morning. That

afternoon Brother Dee paid us one of his many visits. Three-year-old Georgie had died in convulsions the night before, surrounded by the saints shouting and praying for his healing. The regular preacher of Sister Allie's sect was off holding a revival in another part of Tennessee, and Brother Dee was to hold the burying of little Georgie at the mountain cemetery around the bend.

"You never know when Jesus is gone to come down an take a baby," Brother Dee told us. "Sometimes He takes it as a jedgment cause you loves it more'n you do Him. Didn't He tell ol Brother Moses way back yander he was a jealous God?"

On our way to the little grave Harold and I picked a bunch of mountain laurel and honeysuckle, then joined our neighbors who had also brought bouquets of wild flowers.

Brother Dee thanked the Lord for the afflictions He sends His saints. He thanked the Lord for misery and death, because those are His ways of testing the saints. He praised Allie for not calling a doctor and sending her baby to Hell, while Allie prayed, "Thank you, Jesus, fer taking my baby home. Thank you, Lord. Now I know he's safe in yore lovin arms. Thank you, Jesus. I ain't worried no more!"

Harold and I walked away with heavy hearts, passing among the graves—three-quarters of them those of babies. Bright feathers, pieces of colored glass and bits of shell decorated the little mounds of red earth.

We came to a double mound. A bent figure on her knees ran her hands through the dirt and wept. She told us her two least ones—a little boy of twenty months and a little girl of nine months—had been burned to death in her wooden shack while she was away at work. Her older boy, now eleven, hadn't been right in his head since birth. "I'm aimin to take him to Blackberry Mountain fer healin if I kin git away," she said.

Three days later we were on our way to Blackberry

Mountain, the Holy Hill, World Headquarters of the Church of God, sometimes known as the Conquering Church of God, to distinguish it from the many other sects of that familiar name.

The Storm Troopers of the Conquering Church clicked their heels and came to rapt attention in front of a bronze statue when State Overseer Moxer called, "Halt, brothers!" Trumpeter Henry, dragging one foot after the other in the rear of these grown boys, lifted up the shiny horn strung over his shoulder, put it to his mouth and blew in it all the air from his flat chest.

The blast rolled down the mountainside, scaring out of the bushes a trembling jackrabbit, whose stubby tail quivered from the vibrations, and a couple of boy and girl sinners, who had been dawdling in a patch of goldenrod.

The girl was still whimpering from fright when Brother Moxer on top of the mountain grabbed the trumpet from Henry's mouth. "That's nough, Henry," he said. "That's nough to scare forty-leven devils out of yore pore ma who's come here to this holy mountain to be healed. Brother Color Sergeant, raise up the Church of God standard. Let it float out to the world fer the healin of the nations."

A broad-shouldered youth whose muscles flexed like a panther's under his scarlet uniform stepped from the ranks and came forward, carrying the four-color flag of the Church of God. He rammed the flag into a heavy wooden stock, enameled in gold, standing under the monument. Then he turned in the direction of the State Overseer, his eyes staring straight ahead.

"Lord's will done as ordered," he rasped. "Color Sergeant Lee waitin on the Lord."

Brother Moxer mounted a pedestal and stood in front of a microphone with the words, "Church of God," around

the mouthpiece. Looking down on the sea of faces, he shouted, "Saints, while the Chambersville Church of God Band plays the Church of God Victory Song, stand up an salute the Church of God flag."

Cornets and trombones began blaring out a loud, teasing tune from the bandstand near the monument. The delegates from Wyoming were the first to rise to their feet, led by Overseer Hancock, the converted shepherd.

Their big banner with the embroidered inscription, "Wyoming's Working Wonders," was waving high in the air as saints from Texas, Maine and Ohio lumbered to their feet and started jigging to stretch their limbs. Sister Bertha, the former hobo girl from Louisiana, showed an enormous pair of pink panties when she uncrossed her legs and stood up. "Move them legs so you won't be shamin the Church of God with what they's wrapped up in," Sister Dawson, the healin woman from Georgia, said, leaning over and rapping Sister Bertha on her shoulder. "Next general convention I'm gone to git up an make a motion to keep women saints from wearin pink britches."

Brother Jacks, the drummer, rattled his sticks in a sharp rat-tat-tat across the cowhide sides of his instrument. Brother Moxer stretched out his right arm toward the Church of God flag, followed by the assembled saints whose hands remained tense and rigid, pointing toward the banner.

"Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" Brother Moxer led off.

"Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" echoed the saints.

"The Church of God will rule the world. Bless you, Lord God Almighty, fer revealin the Church of God in these last days."

"Glory! Glory! Bless you, Lord God Almighty, fer revealin the Church of God in these last days."

Brother Moxer turned sideways facing the monument and threw out his arms to the squat stone figure of an aging

man, looking down on the worshipers. "Bless you, General Overseer Tompkins, fer organizin the Church of God on this holy mountain."

"Oh, bless you, General Overseer Tompkins, fer organizin the Church of God on this holy mountain."

"Bless us fer the healin we're gone to git fer our bodies."

"Oh, God, bless us fer the healin we're gone to git fer our bodies."

The faces of the saints from forty-eight states were one great wave of ecstasy. "Oh, God, bless us an give us the healin now," moaned Sister Ebby, lying on a stretcher in that tract known as the Acre of the Woods, where the sick waited for mercy as the children of Israel waited for manna in another wilderness.

"Put that trumpet down, boy," Storm Trooper Commander Wiley whispered to his son, Henry. "Ef you let out one toot, I'll fan yore pants off with this ridin whip." Commander Wiley, who had been pardoned by the Governor for killing his third wife, stood erect, his chest swelling like a barrel bursting its staves, as Brother Moxer finished the prayer of salute.

"Bless the Storm Troopers fer keepin order in the Church of God. Keep the Holy Ghost fires blazin in their sticks to burn our sins away."

"Bless em, Lord. Bless the Storm Troopers! Keep the Holy Ghost fires burnin, Lord, till all sin is burnt out of the Church of God."

"Hallelujah to God an Brother Tompkins!"

"Hallelujah to God an Brother Tompkins!"

"Brothers and sisters," Overseer Moxer dropped his arm and so did the listening saints, "there's them in the worldly churches that says our salute is like the one Na-zis give to that mean ol Dutchman, Hitler. They dee-fame the Church of God by sayin we's imitatin Hitler by havin Storm Troopers. Bless yore hearts, children, that there salute an them

there Storm Troopers was revealed to Brother Tompkins right after the Lord revealed the Church of God to him on this very mountain forty years ago. But the Devil done stole the secrets of Brother Tompkins' mind an turned em over to Hitler. Hitler's afraid the Church of God's goin to conquer the world fer the Lord. But Hitler wants to conquer the world fer the Devil, an he done stole the Church of God conquerin signs to fool the people.

"But them conquerin signs is also represented in our Church of God flag. The red on that flag stands fer the same thing the Storm Troopers' uniforms stands fer—the blood of all the saints ever killed by the Devil. The blue stands fer the truth of the Church of God, an the white fer the purity of General Overseer Tompkins. The gold of the Star, the Cross, and the Crown sewed in that flag stands fer kingship, an we's all gone to be kings under the Lord an Brother Tompkins.

"Our General Overseer'll be General Overseer of the whole world. He'll set in the world capitol that's to be built right here on Blackberry Mountain an rule the nations. Them airships'll be takin off in all directions from the airport that's to be the back yard of the capitol. They'll be flyin the Church of God flag, which'll be the world flag, an carryin the General Overseer's orders to all them different countries.

"Now, folks, all mornin we's been lookin here at the monument to our General Overseer. We built this monument to a man what's livin, cause he's gone to keep on livin an rulin forever. Now we's gone to look on him in the flesh, comin in from the thickets where he's been with the Twelve Apostles, prayin fer the healin of the sick. Play soft an sweet, brother band men."

The band began a slow, solemn march, and Sister Bertha elbowed her way toward the front through a dozen delegations from as many states. "Drat you, sister," said the healin woman when Bertha shoved her to get by, "ef you wasn't in

the Church of God, I'd pull ever string out of yore lousy stack. Sister Bertha muscled through to the edge of the crowd as the General Overseer emerged from a small cottage on the grounds. Then she let out a great wail, and the rest of the saints joined in.

Five thousand pilgrims to the holy mountain watched General Overseer Tompkins trudge slowly and painfully along the concrete walk leading from the cottage to the monument. His body was bent under the huge *papier mâché* cross he carried on his shoulders. Sweat trickled down his plump cheeks as the sun baked his thin gray hair. The General Overseer breathed heavily and noisily as he plodded toward the microphone. The Twelve Apostles followed, dressed in imitation of the original disciples, their heads draped in turbans, fancy flowered bathrobes over their cheap cotton suits and rough brogans. The apostles kept their eyes on their leader as he dropped the cross at the foot of the microphone and mounted the stand.

"My children"—the General Overseer's voice was that of a man who is weary and broken—"my heart is too much burdened for the sick to let me preach to you. The Lord filled the batteries of my soul with the current of His love this morning and gave me power to heal all that are sick. We have with us the lame, the halt and the blind, and those who are just feeling bad, all seeking the health that doctors can't give, but which the Lord has put in your General Overseer's hands to dispense to those that believe.

"Now, children, your General Overseer doesn't pester you with bills for treatment like doctors do. No sir, neither me nor Sister Dawson nor any other Church of God healers. But the sacred olive oil for the anointing costs money, and we had a hundred barrels of it delivered up here to Blackberry Mountain because so many suffering folks have come to this general convention. We got Sister Ebby Rawley all



the way from Mississippi to get the rheumatism out of her blessed heart. We got a dozen others here looking for the healing powers of the Church of God to raise em out of their misery. That may mean we'll have to buy more oil to grease the evil spirits out of their poor bones. That'll mean more money. Brother Storm Troopers, take up the collection."

The Storm Troopers picked up fishing nets on long poles that had been lying at the base of the monument and started moving among the delegations. "Here's my wood-choppin money," howled Brother Bill Gresham of Kentucky, dropping ten ragged one-dollar bills into a net. "Take it, Lord. Take it. I'll chop nough wood round here to buy my ticket back."

"Here's my clo'es-washin money!" screamed Sister Lilly Popper of New Mexico, dropping a handful of halves and quarters in the net carried by Color Sergeant Lee.

"Here's my sweat money!" called out Sister Lulu Tarkins of Missouri. "I ain't sweat so much in my life as I done over that hot stove, cannin fruit fer that rich lady this summer."

"Walter, you an Roxie bring back them nickels I give you to spend at the ice-cream stand!" Sister La Verne Stanley of Texas bawled to her kids. "You ain't gone to fill up on that trash when them sick folks need that precious ile."

Storm Trooper Commander Wiley scowled at a neatly dressed old man about to put a dollar bill into the net. "You do better'n that, you ol buzzard," he growled, "or we'll take that concession fer the ice-cream stand away from you. Then you'll be shimmyin round like a grasshopper without a shirt this winter." The old man looked into the bulldog face of the commander, squirmed and nervously dropped in three more bills.

The General Overseer beamed at the Storm Troopers when they brought him the nets bulging with greenbacks and silver.

"Turn the offering over to my boy, Oris," he directed. "He's the Church of God treasurer and takes good care of the Lord's money." Then he stepped to the microphone.

"All right, folks, the serving brothers are rolling out the oil barrels. Let the sick come forward believing in God and the Church of God, and they'll be healed."

The General Overseer walked from the pedestal to stand in front of the big statue of himself. The Twelve Apostles who had been waiting beneath the microphone lined up in a double row along the concrete walk, being joined by the forty-eight overseers from the forty-eight states, twenty-four overseers standing with six apostles on each side of the pavement. The line maneuvered itself into a curve so that each suffering saint, running the weird gauntlet, would swerve at the end and face Brother Tompkins beneath the monument. Sister Dawson presided over a barrel of olive oil at the beginning of the line, ready to spread the sacred remedy on the faces of the sick with handkerchiefs specially blessed by the General Overseer.

Sister Ebby lay on her stretcher and watched the infirm and ailing start down the line. A middle-aged man whose face was dripping with the pus from erupting boils was the first to go through. Sister Dawson quickly applied the handkerchief and boomed, "That's the first step, brother, the anointin with ile. Now the next is the layin on with hands as the Scripture says. No, don't start backin out, brother. The brothers may hurt you a little, but it takes a hard beatin to git the Devil out of yore system."

Commander Wiley stepped forward from the cordon of Storm Troopers standing near to keep the patients from stampeding the healers. "You're holdin up the works, buddy," he growled. "Git goin." He gave the man a quick shove which sent him running through the line. The sixty men howled and jumped as they moved in on the patient. "Send him up here quick, Lord," prayed Overseer Moxer. "Send

him up here so I can git in a lick to help beat the Devil out of him."

Some of the healers touched the man firmly on the head, bearing down heavily on his skull and nose till the blood started flowing from his nostrils. One of the apostles clipped him on the jaw as he came by, sending him reeling against the apostle on the opposite side. A cracking blow on the opposite jaw sent him spinning down the line for alternate blows on each cheek from the roaring, panting apostles and overseers. Finally he fell at the feet of the General Overseer, his eyes swollen, his lips cut, his face bleeding from red, swelling welts, and the pus from the broken boils congealed in yellow clots from forehead to chin.

"Bless you, brother," said the General Overseer raising his hands, "a doggone doctor would have charged you ten dollars to open up those boils. And you'd have still had the Devil in you to make em fester up again. All right, serving brothers, pick him up and take him back to his folks."

"Let me go next," Sister Ebby whimpered to her brother and husband, who were holding the stretcher. "I want to git up and be walkin agin so I kin cook an wash fer you an the young-uns like a Church of God wife ought to."

"The General Overseer told me he'd call out yore name when he got ready fer you, Honey," her husband answered patiently. "Devil's been plaguing you so long you's a special case. Jest watch that sister with the cancer on her nose go through."

Six people were running the gauntlet, headed by the frail woman with the pearlike growth protruding from her nose. Overseer Moxer reached out and pinched the cancer, yelling, "Come out of her, you that planted it on her nose so she couldn't smell that brimstone of yorn. We're gonna twist you out of her an send you back to Hell. Glory! Glory! Glory! I kin feel him squirmin."

The woman broke loose from Brother Moxer and shielded

her face with her hand as she resumed her way down the line. An apostle yanked her by the hair and pulled her up by her heels shouting, "Whee! Whee! O—ee—ee!" Then in the syllables of the Unknown Tongue, "*Yret! Plek nob vac zog.*" The woman looked wild-eyed as each of her tormentors grabbed her and answered in that same mysterious language of the saints, "*Afk hul mek taf gre.*"

The five people back of her were howling, kicking and stumbling as they went through the line. As fast as one patient reached the General Overseer's feet for the final blessing Commander Wiley would shove in another. Little ninety-pound Sister Ebby moaned louder and louder as each sufferer went through the line for his treatment.

"Oh, Lord," she prayed. "Don't keep me waitin much longer. You know I'd ruther go to glory with grace in my soul than take them pills the doctor gives an live in sin. But, Lord, my pore husband an young-uns ain't got nobody to take care of em but me. Lord, little Mary Virginia ain't but two years ol. She ain't hardly stopped suckin. Please, Lord God, don't you an the General Overseer make me wait much longer."

Sister Bertha caused a commotion by stepping from the crowd and presenting herself to Sister Dawson ahead of the others, saying as she slipped Commander Wiley a bill, "Remember you promised to look the other way."

"Why, you low-down strumpet," Sister Dawson hissed. "All's hurtin you is you's always in heat like an ol bitch dog. If pawin by men woulda cured you, you'd been well long ago. I hope the good Lord'll strike me dead if I ever dab you with a drap of ile to anoint you."

"I'm a high-toned lady," Sister Bertha answered haughtily, "an I don't want nobody anointin me what ain't a lady." She tossed her head from side to side, hips swaying and eyes laughing.

State Overseer Bixby of Alabama slapped her loudly on

the buttocks. "O-oh," she squealed, "I'm feelin better already." One of the apostles reached out his finger to her mouth, and she bit him playfully. "That's the way I bite the Devil when he starts nibbin me," she laughed.

"Step it up, sister," grumbled Brother Moxer. "I ain't wantin to feel you, an you's holdin up them behind you."

Sister Bertha quickened her pace, her bosom heaving and her legs quivering as she howled, "Hallelujah, brothers, give me all the power you got. All you got an not a smidgen less."

When she reached the General Overseer for the final blessing, he said out of the corner of his mouth, "If you keep on like that, I'm going to kick you out of the Church of God. I'm getting tired of having good tithe-paying sisters drop out, taking their husbands with em on account of you."

He was cut short by Sister Dawson. "Stop the line! Stop the line and let Sister Ebby git through. She's turnin black in the face an I'm skeered the Lord's gone to call her home if she don't git healed right now."

Brother Tompkins held up his hand. "Brother Storm Troopers, hold back everybody till we put Sister Ebby through. Brother Commander, help her husband move her off the stretcher and bring her up for the special treatment."

The men on one side of the line raised their hands and joined them to the hands of those on the opposite side. Her husband and Commander Wiley lifted her by the legs and laid her across the solid pathway of arms. "Hallelujah!" called Brother Moxer. "Bounce her up high, brothers. Bounce her up high. Bounce the Devil out of her so he'll go flyin away an never come back to give her the misery."

As the men threw her into the air Sister Ebby shouted feebly, "Thank you, dear Jesus, thank you!" Then they flung her in high, dizzy arcs and rapid, whirling circles till her heart pounded like a triphammer through her thin shirt-waist.

"Hallelujah," she managed to gasp. "Halle—" Then the

blood flowed from her mouth and dripped down in a little red rain on the men below.

"Let her down—quick!" shouted Brother Moxer. Two of the healers grabbed her by the legs, two more by the arms, and the four laid her on the concrete. When the General Overseer reached her, she was a crumpled heap. Then the slight flicker of the eyelids ceased, and the last bubble of air escaped her lips.

"Everybody but her husband and children stand back," commanded Brother Tompkins. "Folks, this is a sign. She's the first one the Lord's called home from the top of this holy mountain. Some day He's going to come down and take us all home like that when we are meeting here in General Convention. That'll be the time of the rapture when we are caught up alive to float with him for a thousand years in the air before he sends us back to rule the world."

His words rose clear and distinct above the wailing of the nine children. "We'll bury Sister Ebby here on Blackberry Mountain," he said. "We'll build a big marble vault and put her in there to wait for the rest of us till we get started on wings for the rapture. We'll plant around the vault some of the sacred palm trees that we've just had shipped in from the Holy Land. We'll put in her coffin a bottle of the Holy Water that was dipped direct out of the River Jordan and sent to us.

"Now, all of that is going to take money if we bury Sister Ebby like the Lord wants her to be buried. Brother Storm Troopers, take up the collection."

## CHAPTER VI

### CEDAR BRAKE MIRACLE

The summer wore on. Not only our work, but the cabin, our friends, our comings and goings began to take on more and more the pattern laid down by the Word.

Our faithful helper, Sister Allie, brought us all the community gossip, including the choice piece about Brother Dee's having been drummed out of the Conquering Church of God three years ago, when he swapped a barrel of healing oil for a hog. She also interpreted all radio news by the prophecies in the Book of Revelation and showed us the path Lord-fearing people should tread.

She was agin my slacks, Mrs. Roosevelt's gallivantin and, more seriously, against some of the community people who came to be identified as our friends. When I became impatient and spoke of Sister Allie as "a sanctified old hen," Harold called me down as a husband should in our Country of the Word.

"Seventeen years with the Yankees have done you no good," he chided. "It's gotten you into the bad and independent ways of the world."

One morning Allie burst in like a fire horse and, before she was half way through the door, began, "I knowed it! I knowed it all the time that no good would come out of them folks."

"Who is it now?" I heaved a sigh, knowing no good was coming out of Sister Allie's mouth.

"It's Clara, ol Dessie's girl. She's done run off to Ross-ville with that good-fer-nothin Lennie Conley."

After a few minutes of all-round silence, Allie tuned up again. "I knowed no good would come of Dessie's young-

uns. Her a-runnin round with them CIO's, helpin start up secret societies agin the spressed Word of the Lord. Don't the Word say, 'Servants, obey yore masters'?"

Neither was Lennie's mother, a zealous saint of Brother Dee's new Sanctified Church of God, satisfied with a courthouse marriage in that Georgia Gretna Green of Rossville, located just outside the city limits of Chattanooga, Tennessee. She insisted on a real mountain wedding to be blessed as well as sanctified by Brother Dee. For was it not through the brush arbor meeting held by Brother Dee to get the first members for his sect that Clara and Lennie had both been saved before slipping off into the woods to sin a little?

And so a few days later we were guests at the church wedding of Clara and Lennie, and the circumstances reminded me of the story Harold used to tell about Kitty Lou Banks and Little Joe Tountgate back there among the charcoal burners of Bell County, Texas.

Daisies and mountain honeysuckle were stuffed tight into the pitchers and canning jars hung along the walls of the Buckhorn Creek Apostolic Church. "Don't it look purty?" Minnie Lawrence whispered to her man, sitting in a fidget beside her. "Us lady saints worked all mornin long sprucin up the place. Reckon we're gone to see the stylistest weddin's ever been pulled on Buckhorn Creek."

Sister Minnie turned around to grin and nod at her neighbors packed in every row of the hard pine benches. Adding them up, she saw nobody was missing. Every charcoal burner from Hardrock Holler to Pickens Crossing had scrubbed his face, polished up his brogans with lamp black, and turned out for the wedding of Kitty Lou Banks to the preacher's boy, Little Joe Tountgate.

"You young-uns simmer down," Sister Minnie called to the crowd of children who ran up and down the aisles bawling, sucking their thumbs and kicking each other in the



shins. "Tain't no way to act in church when the preacher's gittin ready to talk."

Miss Blossom got up from her bench, gathered up her voile skirt, and sat down at the organ the saints had picked up for five dollars at a second-hand store. The organ wheezed out "Trusting and Happy" and the saints started humming the tune.

Then Kitty Lou walked down the aisle a couple of steps ahead of the lean, gaunt youth whom she dragged by the arm. "Git out of the way, Willie Mae!" Mom Porter yelled to a little girl who bounced out of her seat and started walking backwards facing the bride. "You'll trip the bride in her weddin veil us ladies sold butter to git from Sears, Roebuck."

Somebody grabbed Willie Mae and pulled her to a bench in the next aisle, but Kitty Lou glanced neither to right nor to left as she neared the altar. There was a faint smirk on her heavily rouged lips when she looked into the face of the preacher. Little Joe swallowed and scowled at his father, Big Joe, standing at the altar, Bible in hand, and bowing to the saints before him.

Miss Blossom pumped out a last squeaky note which Baby Durkin took up with a howl as a wasp settled on his naked thigh. Big Joe started booming out the marriage ceremony. "... And now I pronounce you man an wife," he ended.

Kitty Lou threw her plump arms around Little Joe's neck and gave him a smack that sounded like the charcoal crackling under her daddy's kiln. She grinned up at him, showing her buck teeth, all brushed up with some baking soda and a clean rag. Little Joe's face was that of a man who has bitten into a green persimmon. He brushed his lips to hers without moving a muscle.

The saints rushed up to the altar to kiss the bride and shake hands with the groom. "The Lord's blessin is hoverin over this church house an all them that's in it," Big Joe assured the saints, then turned to stroke the bride's shapely

hips with his lean, curved fingers as the women swarmed around her. Little Joe shuffled from one foot to the other and pulled at the arm of his woman. "Let's git goin," he said. "My cabin's all readied up fer you an there's a new straw pallet on the floor."

When the lady saints heard that a buzz flew from bonnet to bonnet, and the men saints ogled the bride as the crowd moved toward the door. "Hallelujah!" shouted Uncle Billy Upshaw, jumping high on the peg leg he got from bush-whacking Secesh back in the cedar brakes during Civil War times. "Ring them bells of love," sang out Mom Haskell, and the saints took it up:

"Do the best you can; be a friend to man.  
Ring them bells of love,  
Ring them bells of love,  
Ring them bells of love.  
Lead the weary soul to the shiny goal;  
Point the way to realms above.  
Ring them bells of love,  
Ring them glory bells of love,  
Ring them bells of love."

Next morning the old rooster stood on the window sill crowing up bad company when Little Joe ambled into his father's kitchen. The bacon was sizzling in the frying pan, coffee was boiling in the pot, and Big Joe was honing his razor, getting ready to scrape his whiskers. "Well howdy, boy!" he sang out. "How's sleepin with yore new woman last night?"

"You done got her two months gone an I'm a-lightin out fer Travis County," Little Joe grumbled. "Heerd ol man Mangham done pay em a dollar an a quarter a cord fer cuttin cedar posts, an that's money."

Big Joe laid down his razor and leaned square across the table to face his boy. "Son, a gal that's got big cause she's

swallowed a punkin seed ain't nothin to run out on. Didn't Abraham do the same like me with that there Hagar hussy? His folks didn't do no runnin out on him cause he done the will of the Lord.

"I was a-lyin here last night, son, with no woman to love up since yore pore mammy died from swaller'n so much charcoal dust an since I married you off to Kitty Lou to keep them sisters from spreadin their mouths bout me." Crocodile tears welled up in Big Joe's eyes.

"But, son, a vision done come to this pore ol preacher. Last night the Lord he fanned his wings an lit down on my bed. Hallelujah!" Big Joe's voice boomed on like thunder rolling down Hardrock Holler.

"He flapped them wings twict over my head. That done blowed the misery out of my heart. Glory! Glory! I peeled my ears like a fiddler tunin up his music box an heerd what He had to tell me.

"'Big Joe,' He says, 'the brothers an sisters don't always understand My workin. But I ain't lettin no saints mess up my plans. There was somep'n in it when Kitty Lou slipped into that back door an into that bed of yorn. That woman ain't no Mary Mag-da-lene. An if them charcoal burners start throwin rocks at her, I'll step on em like they's fishin worms.

"'That woman's a-carryin the Messiah chile,' the Lord tole me confidential-like. 'Now you gotta exhort them saints day an night an get em stirred up to meet Him.' "

"Amen!" Little Joe shouted. "Thank you, Pa, fer turnin over a woman like that to me. I shore am glad I didn't marry one of them fiesty Patton gals who'd a—" Little Joe stopped short as the kitchen door sprang open.

In walked Kitty Lou, spitting like a wildcat. "I ain't a-gone to be left all by my pore lonesome on my weddin mornin," she stormed. "All night long I lay on that pallet an my hus-

band paying me no mind. There he stayed, rolled over on the other side jest like an ol possum up a dead limb. Both of you done slep with me an one of you's gotta stay with me."

Big Joe raised his hand over her head in a benediction. "The Lord done cast His blessin on you, daughter. He done revealed to me you's a-carryin the Messiah chile. Praise Him! Praise Him! It's the will of the Lord fer them saints to make ready fer that blessed young-un. They's gotta build a temple to receive him."

Kitty Lou's mouth opened so wide her daddy might have driven a wagon down her throat. Then she jumped upon the table and started whooping and dancing. "Oh Glory, Glory! Bless you, Lord, fer givin me sich a chile. Hallelujah! Thank you, Lord! I didn't know my young-un'd be like that. Oh Glory Day! Yes, thank you, Lord! Thank you!"

She jumped down, rolling on the floor, shouting and banging her head. Little Joe pulled her up by the shoulders. "You wanta lose that young-un fore it ever gits out? There's plenty of saints whose bellies ain't that big who can carry on without you."

Big Joe flashed a warning. "Come Wednesday night prayer meetin we gone to bring the Lord's revelation to them saints. Don't you all go shootin off yore mouths fore that time."

Wednesday night found the kerosene lamps all lit up in the Apostolic Church as the saints poured through the door. Big Joe walked in slowly and humbly after all the saints were seated. He bowed his head low at the altar for a minute before raising his eyes toward heaven. Then he climbed up to the pulpit, spread out his arms, and everybody quieted down. Big Joe wore a rapt expression.

"Saints," he began, "tonight you all is gone to hear the Lord's will. Glory hallelujah! I been a-talkin to Him ever since I married my boy, Little Joe, to Brother Tom Banks' girl, Kitty Lou. An I'm gone to tell you tonight what He done said to me."

"Hallelujah, brother, tell us! Tell us!" the saints begged.

Big Joe leaned out far over the pulpit, his eyes closed in a trance; the saints held their breath. Then he banged on the pulpit with his heavy fist. "Saints, hear the will of the Lord consarnin His daughter, Kitty Lou, that done married my boy, Little Joe. The Lord done poured out His blessin on that holy little woman an His saints down here on Brushy Creek.

"Kitty Lou Toungeate, her that used to be Kitty Lou Banks, has got inside of her a man young-un. Tain't no young-un like you all ever had with its nose a-drippin an its head a-gittin full of bugs."

Big Joe paused and looked into the faces of the saints as they sat with clenched hands and frozen mouths. "Kitty Lou Toungeate is a-carryin inside of her the Messiah chile."

Then there was let loose a flood of praise and rejoicing. The kerosene lamps shook as the saints rocked and rolled, laughed and sang. Happy Luke, he who had been trying to get Miss Blossom to marry him for thirty-five years, ran up and down the aisle on all fours, barking and whimpering like one of his own coon dogs. And even Miss Blossom did a prim little jig in front of the organ.

After an hour had passed Big Joe yelled out, "Set down, blessed of the Lord. Fer the Lord's done got some more things to say to you all."

The saints took their seats. Miss Blossom blushed and dropped her eyes as Happy Luke straightened up and winked at her. Big Joe continued, "Now, I know you saints here on Buckhorn Creek always minds what the good Lord tells you. An He's done tole me he wants you to build a temple fer that blessed Messiah chile. We's gone to start right out to-morrow an git that temple ready fore Kitty Lou's time. We's gone to build it over there on that five acres I bought up at the tax sale three year ago.

"Let's take up the first collection fer the temple buildin."

The saints emptied nickels and coppers from little tobacco

sacks and old leather purses. Skinflint Sandlin, the general storekeeper, dug into his pocket and came up with a quarter, dropping it into the collection plate with a loud clang. Before their eyes Big Joe counted nickel for nickel, copper for copper, and put the money in a tin box.

"Saints," he growled, "jest so long as this here box makes a rattlin noise, the Lord's gone to be mad. It's got to be filled up plumb solid so you won't hear nothin scrapin round when you shake it. Can't nobody build no temple on money like that. If you all don't want to send down His righteous wrath on yore heads, you'd better start firin them kilns. Else you'll burn blacker'n a piece of charcoal down where the fires git hotter'n Texas in August."

The saints were impressed to the point of silence. Only Skinflint Sandlin got up, cleared his throat, and uttered a complaint. "Now, Brother Joe, all them cedar brakers is a-owin me money fer the grub they got last winter. Don't seem right fer em to be givin money fer a temple till they pay up them grocery bills. Don't the Word say, 'Owe no man nothin.'"

But Brother Joe was ready for him and thundered back, "Lay not fer yoreself treasures right here, or you'll be a-wantin in Heaven. When the Messiah chile comes, nary a single cedar braker'll be wantin fer a nickel. They's gone to pay you up—ever single copper they owe—an not be beholdin to nobody.

"Now, you saints light up yore lanterns an git home. Git a good night's sleep cause we's startin at sun-up tomorrow."

Obediently they started home, dancing and singing little snatches of hymns as their flickering lantern lights bobbed into the distance.

Next morning the sun had hardly risen above Hardrock Holler when the men saints assembled with hammers and saws on Big Joe's five acres by the creek. Big Joe and Little Joe drove up in the preacher's spring wagon, bells and bright

red tassels dangling from the harness of Nebuchadnezzar, the blind mule. While Little Joe held the reins, Big Joe climbed over the seat into the back of the wagon and opened the big Bible in his hands.

"Brothern," he shouted, "the Lord's a-gone to be mighty pleased with the way you all done started mindin Him. When I was a-comin along this mornin, I seen all them sisters firn the kilns so we'd have plenty of money to build this here temple. Hallelujah! Lord bless em. They's gone to turn in ever dime ever Sunday mornin till we git a temple built that ol King Solomon or Governor Ma Ferguson herself'd be proud to rest their hat in.

"Cause we's gone to build this temple jest like the Word says ol King Solomon done built his. An what's good nough fer King Solomon is good nough fer ol Joe Toungate."

For months the men toiled from sunup until sundown while Big Joe stood in the wagon, reading directions for the temple out of the Book. Twice they laid foundations of Texas limestone only to have Big Joe order the stones torn down and new ones hauled in from the bottoms over by the San Gabriel River. "The Lord done come to me in a vision," he said each time. "The Lord done tole me that He ain't satisfied with the way you saints is a-buildin."

The brief Texas spring dried into blazing summer, and still the cedar brakes rang with the sound of hammer and saw as the men labored under the booming commands of Big Joe.

"'. . . He built the house and finished it and covered the house with beams an boards of cedar.' Reckon that's gone to be easy, brothern. Cedar's thicker'n weeds in Little Joe's turnip patch, an her that's carryin the blessed young-un not able to hoe em out. Let's see what else the Good Book says about this here temple.

"'So Solomon overlaid the house within with pure gold; an he made a par-ti-tion by the chains of gold before the or-a-kul; and he overlaid it with gold.' Now that's gonna be a

little hard cause there ain't no gold round Buckhorn Creek cept them two gold teeth Miss Blossom got fer four dollars an ninety-eight cents off that mail-order dentist in Dallas. Guess Brother Skinflint'll have to git some of that gold paper when he goes into Waco to buy them orn-a-ments fer the temple.

"'An he overlaid the che-ru-bim with gold.'" Big Joe scratched his head and frowned. "I ain't exactly ever seen a che-ru-bim. But ef there's one of em prowlin round in this country, we'll ketch it an wrap it up in that gold paper."

Then Min Lawrence's boy, Clarence, piped out, "A che-ru-bim ain't nothin but a baby angel cut out of pasteboard, Brother Joe. They had em in that Christmas play I tuck part in back there in that reform'tory over at Gatesville."

"That's right, son! That's right!" Big Joe assented. "Don't the Word say to train up a chile in the way he orter go an he'll never dee-part from it when he puts on long britches. Amen! Hallelujah! Brother Skinflint can git a couple of them things too while he's a-buyin the rest of the stuff."

The time came when Happy Luke sawed out doors of solid live oak. Ord Thurman was about to paint them when Big Joe yelled, "You ain't gone to mess up the Messiah chile's temple by puttin on them kind of doors. Here the Word done says, 'And the two doors were of fir trees.'"

"Now what kind of trees would you reckon them to be, Brother Joe?" Luke asked.

Big Joe put his finger to the verse and ran it along the page, trying to figure it out. "Not meanin to throw off on you, Pa," Little Joe put in, "but I'd say them was trees that had fur-bearin varmints roostin in em."

"Don't know but what you's right, son; the Word's the Word."

"We'll jest git our axes an chop down some of them coon an possum trees over in the thicket," Ord Thurman volun-



teered. "Temple's gotta go up even ef we have to kill ever varmint nestin up in them trees."

The money in Big Joe's tin box, now packed solid with bills, no longer rattled when he shook it at the saints. A second box was being filled as tired women burnt charcoal and found time to look after Kitty Lou Toungeate.

Kitty Lou's beefy thighs were spread all over the new bed bought out of the temple money when Hattie Green and her daughter, Jinny Ruth, walked into the cabin. She laid down a ragged copy of *True Confessions* and whined, "Can you all wait till I git to the bottom of the page? What with first one thing an another I jest never git down to the best part of this story."

"I ain't aimin to cross you none, honey chile," Hattie apologized. "Jest takin my man a bucket of dinner so he won't cave in a-workin on the temple. I made Jinny Ruth stop frizzin her hair an bring you over a mess of turnip greens."

"I got a turrible lot of washin an I been feelin so porely," Kitty Lou complained. "Jest breaks my back to look at it."

"I can do it fer you," Jinny Ruth offered. "Ma done tole me to help you out with yore washin."

Jinny Ruth began putting into a tub shiny rayon pink panties with cheap lace on the bottom, rayon satin peach-colored petticoats that made her blush, and transparent brassières with ribbon shoulder straps. "Oh, them's sure purty," Jinny Ruth gasped. "How'd you git a Messiah chile, Kitty Lou, stead of a plain one like ever'body else?"

"The Lord done went an blessed me an that's all there's to it," Kitty Lou answered. "But you won't git no Messiah chile ef you keep a-foolin round with that ornery ol Bud Riley out there in that cow pasture. Now, git them clo'es out on the line an we'll take a walk to see how them fool men is a-comin along with the temple."

Ord Thurman, tacking down shingles on the roof, was the first to see Kitty Lou waddling down the road with Jinny Ruth holding her arm to keep her from falling. "There she comes, brothern," he howled. "There she comes with the blessed young-un inside of her an she jest bout ready to pop out. Glory! Glory!" Ord turned a handspring high in the air, and his hammer flew from his hand, almost hitting Kitty Lou in the place where she carried the Messiah child.

Ord slid from the roof to join the dancing, laughing saints. Hattie Green, who had hung around watching the men work, started jabbering in the Unknown Tongue, while Little Joe whacked her fat buttocks and yelled, "That's right, Sister Hattie, let the Lord have His way with you!" Big Joe helped Kitty Lou into the wagon, where she sat like a queen.

The saints, forming a circle, weaved in and around Kitty Lou on the wagon seat. Jinny Ruth panted like a dog and dropped on the ground, kicking her big legs till they were scratched and bleeding from the sharp pebbles. Big Joe looked down at her lustfully, as once he had looked at Kitty Lou there in the back room of his cabin.

"That's right, sister!" he shouted as her dress slipped over her middle and up to her uncombed head. "Show your glory! Show your glory! He'll come in to you ef you let Him. Jest let Him! Jest let Him!"

Jinny Ruth sat up and began sliding on her haunches toward the wagon. She reached the wheel, wrapped her thighs around it and inched up worm-fashion to the place where Big Joe stood charming her as a snake charms a bird. Hanging to the wagon spokes, her body shook, her head snapped back and her eyes shut as she reached out her hand and Big Joe pulled her up to the wagon bed.

Hattie Green climbed a pecan tree yelling, "Higher, Lord, I wanta go up higher." Happy Luke ran up and began slapping her behind. She howled out a hallelujah with each slap, and the limbs of the tree nearly cracked. Happy Luke pulled

at her legs and Hattie let go a kick that landed him on the ground shouting, "Glory! Glory! Oh Lord, don't lemme stay down while that ol sister's a-goin up."

Then Kitty Lou shrieked and slumped over in the seat, catching her breath in short jerks and gasping, "O—ooh! O—ooh!"

"Praise the Lord!" Little Joe shouted. "My wife's got the power! She's done got the power!"

"You derved fool men, she's done got a baby a-comin!" Hattie Green screamed from the treetop. "I'm a-comin down an you all carry her inside. Jinny Ruth, stop foolin with the preacher's belt. Hist yerself out of that wagon an run fer Aunt Sally Sloan."

Big Joe took hold of Kitty Lou's shoulders and eased her over the wagon wheel. Ord Thurman caught her legs and Happy Luke her arms. They carried her into the temple and laid her on a pile of straw taken from the boxes that had contained the temple ornaments. Little Joe looked down worshipfully, unable to say a word, while Hattie Green started a fire outside to heat water.

"The temple shore is purty," Kitty Lou murmured to the saints standing around. "Kind of looks like my rich Uncle Taddy's barn I used to scoot round in when I was little. Oh look, ain't it elegant? Oh that gold paper! Them palm trees! Jest like my Sunday School picshure cards." Her eyes rolled when she saw the angels. "Them angels! An that baby one! It's gone to fly right at me."

"That baby angel ain't gone to be half as purty as the one the Lord's gone to send out yore middle," Big Joe said tenderly. Then Aunt Sally Sloan bustled in and shoosed out the saints.

"Preachin's yore business, Brother Toungate," she rasped. "But birthin's mine. I don't want nobody but Hattie Green comin an goin while I'm birthin this here Messiah chile. Git out, you all."

"Come on out, saints, an let's shout fer glory till the Messiah chile comes out a-kickin," Big Joe commanded. "Happy Luke, go git yore gi-tar. The Lord's done fulfilled His promise an we's gone to sing 'Restin on the Promises.'"

The saints filed out, laughing for joy and giving each other the holy kiss. When Big Joe put his arm around Jinny Ruth's waist and whispered something, she squealed and nodded. Happy Luke fetched his guitar. As he banged on the strings, the saints roared:

"Rest on the promises, beautiful promises,  
Rest on the promises, the holy promises of God;  
Rest on the promises, wonderful promises,  
Rest on the promises, the promises of God."

The saints sang the chorus over and over again as word spread from Hardrock Holler to Pickens Crossing that Kitty Lou was a-birthin the Messiah child. Kitty Lou's daddy, Tom Banks, came leading his brood of seven younguns and thirteen hound dogs, his wife Texanna bringing up the rear. Miss Blossom sedately posted herself a tantalizing distance away from Happy Luke. In an hour's time the cabins were empty and the cedar brakers waited outside the temple while Big Joe exhorted them.

"Saints, the great and glory day has come. The Lord done lighted down agin last night an showed me jest what was gone to happen. He was a-savin that fer the last—that the Messiah chile was gone to be birthed right here in this temple the saints done fixed up fer him. We ain't never had much here on Buckhorn Creek. But jest shortly you can put out the fires in them coal kilns an not be wantin fer nothin never no more."

"Wantin fer nothin never no more," the saints intoned from deep down in their bellies.

"He's gone to build us mansions right down here on this earth," Big Joe continued.

"Right down here on this earth," the saints echoed, raising their hands to heaven.

"He's gone to put money—"

Big Joe stopped dead still when Aunt Sally opened the door and stood facing the saints. There was silence broken only by a faint whimper from Tom Banks' youngest kid, Lena. Aunt Sally glared a long, hard eyeful at Big Joe and hissed between her teeth, "It's a girl!"

Eyes popped; jaws sprang open. Then hell broke loose. "Let's git that old rascal of a billygoat an his boy," Ord Thurman howled. "There they go across that fence! Let's git em an flay em alive."

The saints skinned over the fence and took out after the two. Sticks and rocks whizzed around the preacher and his boy as they headed down the trail that led to the highway. "You low-down fornicatin ol donkey," they heard Bud Riley yell. "They oughta fix you up so you can never git no more Messiah chiles or no more temples."

The saints were hot behind the two when they hit the highway and started, lickety-split, toward the county seat. Neither of them saw the car which missed them by an inch as a long arm shot out and grabbed Little Joe by the collar. "Git in quick, both of you," a voice said. The two men sprang in through the open door and turned to recognize Deputy Sheriff Witt Blair from Belton. The deputy stepped on the gas throttle and the car moved away from the irate saints.

"Reckon you two've been up to something," Blair growled to the panting, sweating pair. "Was going down to pick up Bob Grant for stealing Ab Allen's calf. But I guess I'll have to take you two suck-egg hounds to the county line. An don't let me ever see your ornery faces in Bell County again. I got enough trouble in these parts without mixing up in church fights."

Ord Thurman rallied the frustrated saints. "Now, let's finish up that temple like it oughta be finished up."

Tom Banks, wearing a sheepish look, carried Kitty Lou through the temple door. Texanna followed, the baby wailing, and her own face flushed with shame.

"Load the gal and her brat into my wagon hitched over there," Ord said gruffly to Tom Banks. "Take her home and larn her to keep her skirts down."

Happy Luke picked up a hammer and smashed the glass window by the front door. Ord Thurman grabbed an axe and split the door open with one heavy blow. Hattie green seized the imitation rubber palm trees, tore them apart between her huge arms, shouting, "That's what we're gone to do with them two scalawags when we gits hold of em." Others yanked down tinsel from the ceiling, grinding it into powder under their brogans, and ripped pictures from the walls. Happy Luke began chopping down the back doors made from the trees of the fur-bearing varmints. Aunt Sally yanked at the tail of the cherubim which landed on Happy Luke's head.

"Damn you! I wisht you was real an I'd tear you apart feather by feather." Gritting her teeth, she banged the cherubim with her fists until Happy Luke grabbed it from her.

"Jest let that feller alone! He'll look mighty purty in Miss Blossom's front yard." Happy Luke put the cherubim under his arm and shoved half a dozen saints out of the way. Then he handed it to Miss Blossom as she sat on a stump gazing in shocked surprise at the temple. She smiled coyly, and they walked away, the cherubim dangling between them.

Ord Thurman again became the organizer. "All right, saints, let's finish up the outside."

They tore dead limbs from the trees, lighted the branches and touched them to every corner of the flimsy building. The gold wallpaper rolled up in crackling sheets and melted into ashes. When burning planks fell to the ground, the saints leaped on them and stamped them into cinders. "When we

git them two," Bud Riley yelled, "they's gone to be a-burnin hotter'n this danged temple."

They stayed until the temple was a heaping pile of rubbish which Skinflint Sandlin would haul off tomorrow to fertilize his fields. But, riding to her daddy's home in a borrowed wagon, Kitty Lou suckled her baby.

"Ain't she purty?" she said to the young-uns perched around her as she lay on the straw in the wagon bed. "Jest like them babies in *True Confessions*."

## CHAPTER VII

### ASCENSION ON RAINEY STREET

I heard the brakes screech from where I was standing on the back porch and knew that Mr. Charlie, the mailman, had brought his old Dodge, which we called the chariot, to a halt. How many times we had strolled up and down that lane, waiting for the chariot to rumble along with our daily bundle of mail, that highly treasured link with the outside world.

Directly Harold rounded a corner of the house, reading a penciled letter between spasms of laughter. "It's from Mamma," he said, and broke into another fit of laughter. I couldn't wait and snatched the letter from him.

"That's the aunt and uncle who figure in 'Ascension on Rainey Street,'" he explained, reaching for a handkerchief to dry his eyes.

In picturesque language my mother-in-law had described Aunt Florabelle's visit the previous Sunday. She was rouged and lipsticked a flaming red. Worse still, she had her hair done up in one of those worldly permanents.

Yes, she'd backslid and that unrepentant rogue, Uncle Matt, had taken her "back into the world." If Harold hadn't sent his uncle all those cowboy magazines, maybe Aunt Florabelle would have finally got him "under the blood."

"Ascension" was the first story that Harold told me during our courtship in that Yankee town of New York. Four years afterward I considered it as meaningful as the lights along the East River or the roses that he'd promised to grow for me when we have a home of our own.

Uncle Matt took off his hat before entering the mission. Inside he raised his eyes to the words, "Jesus Saves," smeared



in lurid red paint on the wall. He was reaching in his pocket for the makings for a smoke when his eyes fell on another sign, "No Smoking." Frustrated, he walked up to the uniformed Salvation Army officer at the desk.

"Cap'n Johnson, them naked saints down on Rainey Street can't git back to their WPA jobs if you don't give em some duds to put on their backs."

The Cap'n whistled. "Rainey Street has just about cleaned me out today. Tug Potter just carried away a big bundle, and there've been more besides. What's going on down there, anyhow?"

Uncle Matt spat hard into the cuspidor. "Cap'n Johnson, I ain't no prayin man, but I ain't no lyin man neither. We was gittin long plumb peaceful-like on Rainey Street till the Thirteenth Apostle come an preached that sarmon bout the end of time.

"Ever since I ain't knowed my own home. Florabelle an all them fool women laid off their jobs in the WPA sewin room an ganged up in my house. There they is right now, a-settin round on boxes in them sanctified nightgowns, waitin fer me to bring em back a few rags.

"All that ruckus started last week while I was readin them *Two-Gun Western* magazines that my nephew what writes em sent me. When Florabelle seen them books, she started pesterin me mighty to hear that prophet a-preachin down at the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church. So Sunday night I give in an went on down.

"Well, I done lived a good fifty years. I seen a lot in my time, but I ain't never seen nothin like the Thirteenth Apostle in my born days.

"He stood seven foot high if he stood an inch. When he waved his arms, the bonnets flew off the saints down in front. You could hear the boards a-crackin when he stomped them big bare feet of his. He didn't wear no shoes, no pants, no collar, no shirt, no tie. All he was wearin was that big night-

gown with the shoulders bustin out the seams. Somebody done sewed some words in red where his shirt ought to a been. Them words said, 'The time is at hand.'

"I could feel the bench rattlin under me while he preached. 'Saints of the Livin God,' he bellered out like a bull, 'the Lord has done rolled up all the souls of the Twelve Apostles into me, the Thirteenth Apostle. He sent me to tell you that the end of time is comin quicker than the fastest train rollin down the tracks.

"'Fore this week is out, the panthers is gone to be turned loose outa them a-tarnal hills to chaw up the wicked. The scorpions is gone to swarm down like hoss flies on all them that's not under the blood. The sun's gone to turn red an melt faster'n grease in a fryin pan. Woe, woe to the wicked sinners when the Lord jedges em for their meanness. Woe be to them that wasted the time of grace fightin roosters an pitchin horseshoes. They'll call on the Thirteenth Apostle to help em when them mountains start splittin an them rocks start meltin. But the Thirteenth Apostle won't hear em. He'll be flyin up to Heaven, an all the saints will be spreadin their wings right behind him.'

Florabelle an all them saints started jumpin an yellin, 'Amen! Oh happy day! Oh Lord, send it soon!' Tug Potter's oldest girl—Lura May, who got the Second Blessin after she come up with a baby—started holy jiggin. She jumped over a bench, an her dress flew up way past her thighs. Danny Jones, the half-wit, got down on all fours, barkin an slobberin like a mad dog in August.

"Then, Cap'n, Matt Martin was took off his feet by that Thirteenth Apostle. 'Saints,' he hollered out, 'next Thursday at noon the Lord's gone to come right down here on Rainey Street. He's gone to land right square in Sister Martin's back yard. Then He's gone to march right in her house. All of you will be a-settin there to go back with him to glory.'

"You coulda knocked me dead with a broom straw. Any-

body who moseyed in has always been welcome to stretch his bones in my place. He could stay till he felt like movin on, so long as he didn't mind eatin our pore stuff an sleepin with a bed-wettin young-un. But I likes to have somep'n special for special company. I jest ain't been a-figgerin on the Lord traipsin into my back yard an makin Hissself at home with them saints. But I don't have no time to study it out. The minute the Thirteenth Apostle finishes sayin that, them saints ring round Florabelle, prancin an shoutin, "We'll all be there to go flyin up with you, Sister Martin! Oh glory! Thank you, Lord! Thank you, Lord! Take us with you! Take us with you!"

"I bust through em an git out the door. Then I walk over to Ed Cartwright's saloon on East First Street. I set down an buy me a beer. The more beer I swaller, the more I study bout it. Maybe the Thirteenth Apostle was jest a plumb fool lunatic. If he was now, it might learn them fool women a lesson.

"But maybe the Thirteenth Apostle was right. Maybe the end of time was comin next Thursday at twelve o'clock in my back yard. Whichever way, it was too late for an old plug like me to change.

"I buy me nother beer. Might as well cool off while I can. Then I think bout seein Tug Potter come mornin an makin a match fer my one-eyed rooster, Nero, agin his dominecker. If the horn didn't toot, we'd fight em on the sand banks down by Waller Creek Saturday. The women git paid then, so we could lay down some bettin money.

"I set in Ed's all night an part of the mornin. Then I git up an light out fer home cause I was cravin a bite of bacon an some sleep. I'm stumblin along, hopin the Lord won't catch the smell of likker on my breath right then. When I git me some eats an sleep it off, He might fergit it an not hold it agin me when He lights down this comin Thursday in my back yard.

"I wobbles up Rainey Street bout ten o'clock. Then I stop like I been shot. Trucks was backed up at ever house. Men was haulin out the beds an ever blessed stick of furniture on Rainey Street. I cuss-hollered at em that was carryin off my bed—us is still payin Sam Spencer two dollars a month fer it. But they step on the gas an is splittin dust fore I can git through the gate.

"I was as mad as a turkey gobbler with his comb up when I run in the front room. Ever chair, ever table's done been carried off. There's nothin left but a bunch of boxes an the sewin machine. I seen Tug Potter's girl, Lura May, standin there an her baby suckin. I seen Florabelle an all them saints lookin happy like they got good sense. I look back in the kitchen. There's the Thirteenth Apostle eatin up my breakfast. There's that half-wit, Danny Jones, whinin round him like a sick pup.

"I want to cuss, but the words won't come out. Then Florabelle starts layin down the law. 'Don't you jaw me none, Matt Martin. The Thirteenth Apostle's done told us to sell our worldly goods fore the end comes. When we git to heaven, the angels'll hand us chairs an beds. They'll be pure-dee gold with diamonds stuck in the middle. When the Lord comes Thursday, we'll hand Him the money fer the furniture. He'll burn it up with you an Sam Spencer both in one pile.

" 'We kep our sewin machines to make 'cension robes. An we has to make a fancy dress fer Lura May. The Thirteenth Apostle's done said she's gone to be the Bride of Heaven.'

" 'Heaven or Henry, don't make no difference to me so long as she marries somebody,' I answers short-like. Then the Thirteenth Apostle comes trompin in. All them saints start histin one of them Fire-Baptized songs when he steps in my front room. It's called 'When I Make My Last Move' an goes like this:

“‘Ever thing that I need will be furnished up there  
An not even my song books I’ll bring,  
An the precious old Bible that showed me the way,  
I’ll need not when I stand by the King.’

“But the Thirteenth Apostle don’t pay em no mind. He’s come to tell me off. He takes that big paw an wipes the bacon grease offen his mouth. He looks hard at me, an I eyes him right straight back.

“‘This house don’t belong to you no more, Matt Martin,’ he tells me real short. The Lord’s done took it fer His sanc-su-ary. His Word says no in-fi-del can come closer to the sanc-su-ary then the back yard. Git goin.’

“I never thought no man could order me out of my own house. If the Lord wants my shack, I ain’t a mean enough man to stand agin the Word. But the Lord oughta know how hard me an Florabelle picked cotton an took in washin to build that house. He oughta knowed how my brother, Bird, walked all the way cross town an helped till it’d git dark an us folks couldn’t see our hammers flyin. It was the time my married boy, Larry, chopped off his big toe splittin lumber fer the rafters, an his right foot ain’t been no good ever since.

“Well, I says to the Thirteenth Apostle real gentleman-like, ‘You sure it’s the will of the Lord to put me out of my pore house?’ But all the answer I git from him is a hard, riled look. Them saints is standin right behind him with their heads a-waggin up an down. Florabelle is right in the middle of em. All I can do is scoot out like a tomcat caught on a dinner table.

“I set down on the hammock I rigged up in the backyard. Lots of times Florabelle won’t sleep with me. She says it ain’t right fer a saint to git all mixed up with the flesh. When she’s feelin like that, I jest take my blanket an hit the hammock.

"Old Nero's a-peckin round me. I pick him up an see he's n good fightin trim. I put him down an start readin one of ny *Two-Gun Western* magazines. I'm tired an I oughta sleep. But if the Lord's a-comin in three days, I want to finish that continued story an see if they done caught them range rustlers.

"Bout that time them saints start singin an prayin. I hear the big mouth of the Thirteenth Apostle leadin em. They're singin 'Won't There Be a Great Camp Meetin Up There.'

"Well, Cap'n, there was no more readin fer Matt Martin. No sir! When them saints wasn't denned up in my house singin an shoutin, they was carryin on up an down Rainey Street.

"They'd meet an give each other what they calls the holy kiss. It was plumb disgustin to see the way they'd chaw holes out of each other. I seen the Thirteenth Apostle grab my own wife an smack her, not mindin the snuff. He might nigh chawed out her tongue. But how them fool women hung round the Thirteenth Apostle so they could git the holy kiss. When he'd pick em up in them big arms, they'd squeal like frisky young colts.

"Sometimes the saints'd lock arms an start dancin. Then they'd fall right down in the middle of the street an roll an holler. Most all night they'd set in their houses sewin on their cension robes. You could hear them machines whizzin long after ol Nero woke up at midnight to crow away the stars. My head was gittin worse'n if I drunk a jug of beer, an Rainey Street was all tuned up by Wednesday.

"I'm out there in the back yard, an them saints is all inside. I hear the Thirteenth Apostle a-hummin, an they all jine in with him. Direckly they's hollerin out that fool song, 'When I Make My Last Move,' an their feet is beatin out the time:

" 'When I move to the sky,  
Up to Heaven on high,

What a wonderful trip that will be!  
I'm all ready to go,  
Washed whiter than snow,  
That will be the last move fer me.'

"They sing that verse, an I hear em go out the door. I skin round to the side of the house an see em prancin down the street. The Thirteenth Apostle an the Bride of Heaven's up in front. Pore ol Danny Jones is off to the side, goin along turnin somersets. Marchin behind em was them fool women. They was a-wavin their hands an cuttin down on another verse of that derved song:

" 'Here I'm bothered with packin each time that I move,  
An I carry a load in each hand,  
But I'll not need one thing I have used in this world  
When I move to that heavenly land.'

"They march in an out of ever house half a dozen times. They stop an pray at a place, they then move on to the next house. Then they jest run out of breath.

"When he gits back to my house, the Thirteenth Apostle come out into the back yard an says to me, 'The saints been a-fastin since Monday, but they's havin a feast tonight fore the Lord comes tomorrow. We don't want no in-fi-dels close to the Lord's table. Git!'

"Well, there ain't no juice in my belly neither. I ain't et nothin in so long that my own feet was a-feelin right quare under me. Right then I was powerful hongry. I wouldn'ta minded puttin my feet under them couple of boxes they calls the Lord's table.

" 'But it ain't no use, Matt Martin,' I says. 'You'd better take yourself over to your brother Bird's house while them legs kin still pack you.'

"So I tramps them three miles across town. There's Bird a-settin out termater plants. There's Mamie a-cookin up a mess of mustard greens with a slab of pork in the pot. It shore smells good.

"The beds is fixed up, the tables is in their place, an the chairs too. Ever'thing is so nice an quiet, I jest can't hardly figger it out. The Lord's comin didn't mess things up in this part of town none. I reckon it's cause they ain't saints.

"Well, after supper I tell em how the Lord's gone to come down in my back yard, an how them saints is all denned up there waitin fer Him. Bird an Mamie whooped an hol-lered till I thought they'd bust out of their skins. Then good old Bird says, 'Matt, why don't you sleep here till Florabelle gits over her foolishness?'

"Well, I wasn't in no mind to go back to them crazy doings on Rainey Street. But that's my house that I built, an I'm gone to hold on to it, come heaven or hell fire.

"I mosey on home. It's gittin midnight, an I figger them saints'd be all through stuffin by then. I open the side gate an goes in the back yard. I goes to my hammock, but it ain't empty. There's a man sleepin in it that I ain't never seen before.

"The moon's shinin bright. I see him plain as day. He's got a long beard that stretches halfway down the hammock. We don't live but a short piece from the railroad, an I figger he's some tramp who's makin hisself at home in my hammock.

"Then I seen somep'n white shinin on the ground. I stoop down. They's chicken bones. Then I walks over to the pen where Nero roosts at night. They ain't nothin there but a couple of feathers. Them saints has done killed my pet rooster fer their dad-blamed feast.

"The tramp wakes up. 'What you nosin round here fer?' he yells. He's got a mouth on him like the Thirteenth Apostle, an I sort of shrivel up like I done when the Thirteenth Apostle talked to me.

"'Me an Nero used to live here,' I mumbles out. 'But Nero's done et up by the saints, an pears like I ain't got no place round here no more. If I ain't askin wrong, stranger, who might you be?'



"That tramp looks right through me. Then he says, 'Them that's hell-bound don't know me. I'm the Prophet Lijah, an I come back on the day before Jedgment jest like the Word says I will. Tha's the best chicken I've tasted since I went to glory in my char-iet four thousand years ago.'

"I might nigh chokes on that. Then I answers, 'But you ain't wearin no robe like the Thirteenth Apostle. You got pants on like me.'

"That tickled the Prophet Lijah. 'If you was a-wearin a robe fer four thousand years, you'd be mighty glad to make a change too,' he says snickerin-like. Then he rolls over on the other side an starts snorin.

"I set down under a tree an pull out my makins fer a smoke. Then I start figgerin things. There's thousands of back yards in this here state of Texas an this here town of Austin. Why did the Lord have to pick out Matt Martin's yard to light down in? Why'd He have to send such a passel of folks down on me?—that there Thirteenth Apostle, this Prophet Lijah snorin in my hammock, all them prancin saints. An why'd He have to pick on pore ol Nero, the best fightin rooster who ever put on a pair of gaffs?

"I got tired of thinkin. I was so done in I coulda slep right through Jedgment Day. Jest then my stomach starts actin up, an I most double in two. Reckon that goin without grub fer so long an then eatin too much at Bird's plumb done me in.

"'Dee-flin or no dee-flin the sanc-su-ary,' I says to myself, 'go right in your kitchen an make yourself some strong coffee. That'll straighten you up. If the Lord's a-comin at noon, you'll need it.'

"I steals in the back way real quiet-like. The big pot we got fer savin up soap wrappers is still on the stove. I put in a heap of coffee an put the lid on tight. Then I strikes a match to the jet, an, when it boils, I pour me a cup an set down under the tree to swig it.

"It hardly seemed a minute fore I heard them saints whoopin an howlin. I wakes up under the tree, an the sun is shinin. I listens to the Prophet Lijah an the Thirteenth Apostle in there exortin em. First one, then t'other would beller, 'Make way! Make way fer the great an turrible day of the Lord. He's a-comin. He's a-comin. I kin see Him startin way up there in them clouds. Now He's across the River Jordan. Now He's gittin closer, closer.'

"Then Florabelle come out jest in her underskirt an barefooted. She was carryin a big bundle of 'cension robes. They was soft an white an made out of cheesecloth. She was cuttin down on the singin when she hung them 'cension robes on the clothesline. Then she turns round an looks at me.

" 'Good-bye, ol man,' she sez. 'I'm sorry you ain't comin too. It's gone to be awful lonesome up there without you to pester me fer your dinner. Course the Lord can't have no rooster fightin in Heaven, but I won't fergit there in a-ternity how you was always alongside of me when we picked them cotton patches. An I'll never fergit how you toted pore little Buddy around all night long when he pret near died with the whoopin cough.

" 'Many's the time I talked to you, but you'd never git under the blood. If I was you, I'd be down on my knees, a-cryin fer mercy. Cause there ain't much time left.

" 'The first blast'll come at eleven-thirty. Then us saints'll come out an put on them robes. We done burnt all our earthly clo'es but our petticoats when we et the feast last night.

" 'The trumpet'll blow again at noon. Then the Lord'll light down to fetch us saints. The Prophet Lijah'll be back here in the yard to meet Him. The Thirteenth Apostle's goin on down to the Fire-Baptized Church. He'll wait there with the Bride of Heaven in her fancy weddin dress. Then we'll all fly up together from the church grounds.'

"I reach down in my pocket. I looks at my old Ingersoll. Ten-thirty. 'Good-bye, ol lady,' I says. 'The Thirteenth Apostle an the Prophet Lijah won't have no good word fer me. If it's a-comin, I'd rather be up on my feet to meet it.'

"So I starts walkin up an down Rainey Street. I thinks maybe I mighta done better. Maybe Florabelle'll git a chance to put in a word fer me like she done with that jedge ten years ago when the sheriff found my still down on them sandbanks by Waller Creek. I seen Tug Potter an other men walkin round too. But we jest don't say nothin when we pass. An I hear them saints singin an shoutin in my front room ever step I make.

"I keeps circlin round my house. I wanta see what's gone to happen there even if it don't mean me no luck. I looks at my Ingersoll again. Leyen o'clock.

"Then a cloud come up no bigger'n my hand, but it spread out fore you could say Jack Robinson. The day got dark, an them saints got still.

"Sudden-like, ba-ng! The winders rattle an crack open. Glass is a-flyin ever which way. Steam an smoke is a-puffin thicker'n hell's furnace. I can hear them boxes in my house hittin the ceilin, an my roof rares up till it nearly flies off.

"'Heaven or hell fire,' I says, 'it's here!'

"Them saints then let out such a yell that you coulda herd em all the way to Bird's house. I hears em runnin out the back door to put on their 'cension robes. I scoot round to the side. They was pullin at that clo'es line an howlin like the Devil done got into em stead of the Lord.

"Cap'n, them 'cension robes was all gone, an so was the Prophet 'Lijah.

"My nose starts smellin somep'n worse'n brimstone. I sneak in the back way an go in the kitchen. There's that coffee pot burnt black an lyin on the floor. Gas is a-stinkin up my house so thick you coulda sliced it up with a butcher

knife. I plumb fergot to turn off that jet when I dozed off last night.

"I'd jest got the gas turned off when I hears a horn a-tootin. Them saints out in the back yard hears it too. They flop down on the ground, yellin an prayin.

"'Oh, Lord, take us! Please, Lord, take us even if we is jest in petticoats an not decent! Blessed Lord, fergive us! Oh Glory Day! We want mighty bad to go up proper like in 'cension robes. Don't be mad, Lord, 'cause them 'cension robes is gone. Oh take us with you, Lord! Take us with you, Lord!'

"Seemed like the tootin was gittin closer an closer. It gits up even with my house an starts comin round the side to where them saints was rollin on the ground. I reckoned in my mind to see the Gabriel Angel marchin down Rainey Street an tootin on that there trumpet. But, Cap'n Johnson, that wasn't no Gabriel Angel that come traipsin into my back yard.

"That wasn't nobody but that half-wit, Danny Jones. He was a-puffin out his fool face, tootin on a ten-cent horn. It's still a few minutes till leven-thirty, but pore ol Danny never could tell time.

"Then the cloud passes over an the sun comes out clear an bright. I yanks the horn out of Danny's mouth. Then I yells at them fool women, 'You'd better git up from here an be a-gittin back to your WPA jobs. The Lord done changed His mind.'

"Them was the sorriest sight of women I ever seen in my life. They look like a bunch of ol hens that's jest been broke up from settin. Fer about five minutes they stood there whimperin an lookin at pore ol Danny holdin that horn. Then Florabelle says kind of weak-like, 'Danny, where'd you git that horn?'

"Danny's grinnin an slobberin. 'Postle give it to Danny. Postle tell Danny to blow it. Postle love Danny.'

"Bout that time, Tug Potter's wife lets out a howl, 'Lura May! Where is my pore Lura May?'

"Them women start runnin in their bare feet an flour-sack petticoats to the Fire-Baptized Church, me right behind em. When we gits there, the Thirteenth Apostle an the Bride of Heaven's both gone. But lyin there on the floor is the Thirteenth Apostle's robe an a comb that her ma says was Lura May's.

"Jest then one of the neighbor's boys peeps in the door. 'If you're lookin fer Lura May,' he says, 'she's done gone. She drove away in a Ford with the Thirteenth Apostle. They picked up another man who was clean-shaved when they got round the corner. The Thirteenth Apostle an the other man was all dressed up in fine store suits, an Lura May sure looked purty in that fancy flower dress.'

"I had a feelin about somep'n, so I goes out an starts pokin in the bushes behind the church house. Then I calls to them women to see what I found. There was all their 'cension robes piled up in a heap. On top of the pile was a pair of big false whiskers, the kind I used to stick on when we give entertainments at the Pleasant Valley schoolhouse. I swear to God them whiskers was the Prophet Lijah's.

"'Put them robes on,' I says to them women. 'Tain't decent to be walkin round in nothin but your petticoats.'

"The saints grab up the 'cension robes an start reachin in the pockets. When they didn't find nothin in them pockets, they howled harder'n they would if the Lord had a-come.

"Cap'n, I was plumb riled up when I found out why they was howlin. Women jest beat all, I reckon. They'd put in them pockets all the money they got fer the furniture. An ever'body on Rainey Street still owin Sam Spencer fer it."

## CHAPTER VIII

### HARPS AND HOE HANDLES

The day after we received the letter about Aunt Florabelle, Mr. Charlie brought us another letter. This was from our friend, Brother Claude Williams, of Tennessee, Arkansas, Detroit, and wherever folks are in trouble.

Brother Claude had hoped for a few days rest in our cabin after visiting his sick and aging father in West Tennessee. But it was necessary for him to return to Detroit to preach what he calls "the real truths of the Word" before the Congregation of His People. The Congregation of His People might be called the mother church of Brother Claude's People's Institute of Applied Religion, an organization which gathers up country preachers from the Holiness and other little sects to fight for the hungry.

Brother Claude's letter contained a certificate of ordination for Harold as an elder-evangelist in the People's Institute.

Ten years ago Claude Williams had led his flock to Jordan's banks and told them to build a Canaan on that side of the river known as Arkansas. "For the Promised Land," said Brother Claude, "is wherever men can settle down and grow their taters in peace. God's naked children in Arkansas ought to have breeches without holes in the seats until that day when they hitch up their galluses and climb, shouting with victory, over the hills of glory and down into the Great City.

"For the Lord Our God is a People's God. His mighty arm smites down the planters who tax His children to the last boll of cotton and the last slab of cornbread. He's figuring up the accounts of the planters as they figure up the accounts of their croppers come Christmas every year.

"He's going to keep them working out their debt for all time and eternity as they keep whole families tied down, year after year, to cotton patches and balky mules. He's getting ready to strike down the tyrants who rule His people by keeping them from voting. He's agin poll taxes because He wants His children to bring in the Kingdom of Heaven by votes as well as by praying for it to come.

"He has bent His ear low over the St. Francis Bottoms. He's heard the crying of His children flogged and tortured by mobs and riding bosses. In this day of His wrath He has raised up His prophets who eat corn pone and sleep on pallets with the rest of His children as they proclaim the message of Brother Isaiah, 'Prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones, lift up a standard for the people.'"

He raised up Brother Claude Williams to go down into the St. Francis Bottoms and free those children from old King Cotton and the planter-men. "I started you out as a share-cropper for old man Norton over in West Tennessee so you could tell people to get shut of those planter-men," He told Claude Williams. "If you love me, Claude Williams, you'll go down to that plantation country and show my people how to fight.

"Open up my Book and tell those people they're my children who ought to be free. Tell em they got to get ready for the Promised Land, like my children down in Egypt, before I can help em out.

"Tell my white children that they've got to stop hating my black children and my black children that they've got to start loving my white children. Tell em that I made em all with ears to hear and eyes to see. Tell my children that I made every one of em with mouths to eat the same good victuals. Tell em that I'm tired of em tryin to fill up on sowbelly and then walking around spindly-like.

"Tell their preachers"—and God's voice was like ten

thousand thunders before the St. Francis runs over its banks—"that they've got to get right with my people before they can get right with me. Tell em I'm tired of their holding my people down because they preach nothing out of My Book but what the planter-men want them to preach."

Brother Claude packed up his grip and cranked up his car. He went into churches whose preachers worshiped the dollar and read from the Book that God would lead His sheep to green pastures away from passels of wolves and night raiders. He went into one-room schoolhouses where the little ones of God's people got as far as the third grade before they went out to harvest the waiting fields of the planter-men. He stood up and read from God's Book His condemnation of those who robbed His people in the fields and in the plantation stores:

Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! When the morning is light, they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand.

And they covet fields, and take them by violence, and houses and take them away: so they oppress a man and house, even a man and his heritage.

In that day shall one take up a parable against you, and lament with a doleful lamentation, and say, We be utterly spoiled: he hath changed the portion of my people: now hath he removed it from me! Turning away, he hath divided our fields.

Is it not for you to know judgment? Who hate the good and love the evil; who pluck their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones; who also eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them; and they break their bones, and chop them in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh within the cauldron.

Then shall they cry unto the Lord, but He will not hear them: He will even hide His face from them at that time, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings.

Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable?



Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights?

For the rich men thereof are full of violence.

Then a great revival broke out in Arkansas, and the hoes of God's captive saints in the cotton fields kept in tune, measure for measure with the harps of God's ransomed saints in glory. Mighty signs and wonders were seen out there in the cotton patches. The Lord, said some, stood at the ends of the rows when the cotton was weighed up and pointed the stern finger of judgment at those who put down short weights for the heavy sacks. Men dreamed dreams and saw visions in which God's people held back the fruit of the fields from bosses with cloven hooves in their stirrups and long forked tails curled around their horses' bellies.

Even the skeptics who stayed away from church to hunt rabbits on Sunday felt the Kingdom coming when white folks and black folks began talking to each other across the cotton rows about the People's God and His prophet, Claude Williams. They got under conviction of His Grace when they saw those same white folks and black folks beginning to gather together after work to study from the Word the promises of that Kingdom.

Then from the cotton rows and corn patches the Lord began raising up other apostles to preach that message which He had delivered to Claude Williams. Two share-cropper exhorters, A. L. Campbell and Dan Williams, who had once been members of the Ku Klux Klan, saw the same kind of light that Paul had once seen on the Damascus road and began proclaiming that day when His will should be done on earth as in Heaven. Others, who worked with their hands for six days and preached on the Sabbath, also heard God's commandment to get right with the people. In their pulpits on Sunday they testified to the revelation of Claude Williams. "God is with the people. God is suffering when the

people are suffering. God is oppressed when the people are oppressed. Where the people love each other, there is a union of love with God."

But the ex-Klansman, Dan Williams, who called himself Share-cropper Dan, knew that folks had to go through a lot of hell before they got to Heaven, and he had warned the saints, "Them planters don't want no kind of love or no kind of friendliness between white people and black people."

When the planters had smashed most of the unions in eastern Arkansas, Claude Williams founded the People's Institute of Applied Religion. The planters learned that many of their field hands who had once belonged to the union were now affiliated with this movement, which was all the more dangerous because it based itself upon the Bible, in every word of which the share-croppers believed.

The planters thought they knew how to deal with this organization and the frail, tubercular man who always had more courage than cash. Time and time again white and Negro missionaries of the new faith were driven out of Arkansas for preaching to mixed groups of the Lord's hungry saints. Mobs, armed with guns and clubs, patrolled the roads at night to drive back gaunt, starving men and women on their way to the hidden places of worship in the woods.

But still the message of God's Kingdom on earth spread across Arkansas and into other sections of the Cotton Belt. More and more country preachers saw the signs of the new Heaven on earth. They began preaching it from the pulpits of the Assemblies of God, the Free-Will Baptists, and all those other sects which have sprouted up among the tired, overworked people in the tired, overworked land of the South.

The Reverend Owen Whitfield, a Negro preacher and union leader, led the share-croppers of southern Missouri when the planters drove them by the hundreds from their cabins to the freezing roads in that bitter winter of 1938.

He preached the new gospel from St. Louis to the Arkansas border. Many a saint started down the glory trail with a union card in his hand when Brother Whitfield pounded his Bible.

"Religion is like a bottle of liniment on the shelf, no good to a man with a cut finger unless it is taken down, uncorked and applied. Christ is no use to us sittin' far off in Heaven. For years I took pride in gettin' people ready for the grave where they could find rest in the Lord. But lately I've been thinkin' that folks ought to have a little rest this side of the grave. You know it was the plantation boss who taught us this song, "O Wait Meekly, Wait and Go to Heaven." He gave us an aspirin and now the pain is come back wuss. You can't keep God in Heaven; He'll keep comin' out in people's hearts; you can't stop it. Ever time someone shouted 'Heaven!' we looked up; and, when we looked down, our plates was empty.

"Moses tried to do the fightin' for the people and to tell them he and God would fix things up if they would just sit quiet. He tried to give God the hot end of the poker. But God said to him, 'Moses, you must speak to the people and tell them to fight for themselves. I ain't goin' to do anything for them less'n they be goin' on their own.' Let us here and now resolve that the sheepishness of the sheep is more to be condemned than the wolfishness of the wolf. I say to you not blessed are the pure in spirit but rather blessed are the spirited. Nobody cares for a Negro or a white man a-lyin' out under a shade tree like po' dead possum. Shake a possum out of a tree, the dogs come and he just folds up his arms and gives up. But you run one of those big old coons down out of that tree and he ain't givin' up without a fight. A man can't hear no call from the Lord while he's lyin' around sniffin' ashes. The Lord don't call nobody who ain't first started in of his own self to do the work of the Lord where he sees it has to be done."

The preachers taught the new revelation from the pulpits as long as church doors were open to them. But, when one of the missionaries was driven from his pulpit by land-owning trustees and deacons, he would go to the cabins and barns of the South, preaching this time in secret to small groups of four or five.

"Don't be scared, brothern," he would tell the disciples in overalls and those who gathered with them around smelly kerosene lanterns. "The Lord done said that wherever two or three was gathered together in His name He'd be around some'ers. He done said that the meek was a-gone to inherit the earth. He meant they'd inherit it when they was sassy enough to take it."

Each person attending one of the little meetings would pledge himself to organize a similar group of four or five until soon a whole county full of croppers would be hearing the revelation and receiving the printed Bible lessons in prophetic religion smuggled in by the evangelists. And a whole county would soon be singing the songs of the Kingdom, old tunes with new fighting words like this Arkansas version of the traditional "No More Mourning":

"No more mourning, no more mourning,  
No more mourning after while;  
And before I'll be a slave,  
I'll be buried in my grave,  
Take my place with those who loved and fought before.

"No more mis'ry, no more mis'ry,  
No more mis'ry after while;  
And before I'll be a slave,  
I'll be buried in my grave,  
Take my place with those who loved and fought before.

"Oh, freedom! Oh, freedom!  
Oh, freedom after while;  
And before I'll be a slave,  
I'll be buried in my grave,  
Take my place with those who loved and fought before."

The God of the People came to Claude Williams a second time. His face shone like the sun rising over the St. Francis Bottoms. His eyes were gentle, as in the days when he talked to farmers and fishermen sitting with Him on the Galilee rocks.

"You woke up my children, Claude Williams," He said. "They're coming along fine down there in that plantation country. But there's some more of em I want you to teach out of My Book."

Claude Williams looked at his Maker as a faithful servant who is unafraid. "Let me hear it, Lord," he said.

And the Lord answered, "My children all over the world are fighting somebody worse than all the planters down in the St. Francis Bottoms. Maybe, when they whip him, it won't bring My Kingdom on earth, but my Kingdom'll be a lot closer to the earth and the St. Francis Bottoms when my children destroy his kingdom.

"My children from all over the South are going to Detroit to work. Now you know, Claude Williams, they've never been to a big place like that before. The Evil One has his servants there, and they will set traps for My children to serve their master. They will tell them to beware of My children who are black and My children born across the seas. They will tell them to hate the labor unions started by My servant, Moses, back there on that big Pyramid job. If My children are betrayed, they will help destroy this country I have built to show the power of the People's God.

"Go to Detroit, Claude Williams, and show My people the way."

So it came to pass that Claude Williams went to Detroit where the Lord's children from the South worked in the same factories with the Lord's children from everywhere. There he saw that those children from the South were listening to the voice of the Evil One and hating the Lord's children from everywhere.

So Claude Williams began talking to some of the field-hand preachers who now welded iron and tended furnaces. Already two thousand of them were working in defense plants, and they came mostly from the little sects. Claude Williams organized the preachers to preach God as they knew Him in the factories where they worked.

LAY MY BURDENS DOWN





## CHAPTER IX

## UNCLE BILLY THE BAPTIST

One evening Brother Dee dropped in at suppertime bringing another guest with him. Several times we had stopped by the blacksmith shop of Uncle Billy Robinson, the seventy-five-year-old mountain patriarch and Two-Seed Baptist preacher. Now here he was at our door—broad, bent shoulders that had carried the burdens of anybody who needed help; wide, sturdy hands that still earned the few store-boughten things an old man needs; shaggy gray hair and bushy eyebrows setting off the warm kindly face that looked out at me from under a huge crumpled black hat. Aunt Tut said that Uncle Billy had worn that same hat through forty years of preaching.

"You're mighty welcome," I said to Uncle Billy. "I'm glad you found time to come to see us."

Harold came in from the back yard, and I excused myself for a little while. "Just rest yourselves," I said to our visitors. "My husband will talk to you while I get a bite of supper."

"Sort of thought you might wanta set out two'extr' plates," Brother Dee told Harold. "Bein as Uncle Billy was bout finishin up the day when I come by his place, I jest brung him long."

"Mighty glad you did," Harold answered. "But, if it's a fair question, Brother Dee, how come you so close with the Baptists?"

"Why, my mother, bless her soul, was the singinest, shoutinest Baptist woman that ever lived. She was Uncle Billy's sister."

Uncle Billy nodded. "Fine Baptist woman, Sister Rachel was. Seen her many a time pray an shout all night an do a

man's work plowin all next day. Ain't many like her these days."

"That's right," Harold agreed. "My granny on my mother's side was a fine Baptist woman too, from right out here in Giles County. She always said the Baptist Church was the Lord's church because it was started back in Bible times by John the Baptist.

"Well sir, son"—and Uncle Billy shifted a little in the comfortable rocker—"yore ol granny knowed the Word an knowed what she was a-talkin bout when she said that.

"Don't the Word prove that John the Baptist started the Baptist Church? John didn't call hisself John the Methodist or John the Presbyterian or John the Church of Christ. No sir, he called hisself John the Baptist. An the Word done say that he baptized Christ in the Baptist Church down yander in Jordan River."

I called supper, and Uncle Billy ate like a man who knows the Lord made the fullness of the earth for His children to enjoy. After the meal he lit a corncob pipe, as ancient and black as his hat, and expounded the Word according to the traditions of the Two-Seed Baptists.

Birth, life, death, the raising of pigs and the planting of corn, Pearl Harbor and even the payment of the poll tax were regulated by the Word. All was predestined. All was according to the Word.

All that happened to a person could be determined by whether he came from the good seed that the Lord put into Eve when He shaped her from Adam's rib, or the bad seed that the serpent put into her when he tempted her to steal the Lord's apples. Everybody who came from the good seed was of "the Abel line" and predestined for Paradise. Everybody who came from the bad seed was of "the Cain line" and predestined for the flames. No one could be saved or lost through any virtue of his own; he was marked eternally by

his seed. "A man's life is his crop," commented Uncle Billy. "You kin always tell the seed by lookin at the crop."

During the months that followed Uncle Billy was a frequent visitor at our cabin. "He jest sort of took to yore husband," Aunt Tut remarked. Long after Baby and I would be sound asleep Harold and Uncle Billy would sit up, swapping Scripture. But best of all the old man liked to hear Harold talk about the pre-Reformation, non-Catholic sects through which all the Baptist denominations claim descent in a long if questionable line from the apostolic church of Peter and Paul.

Sometimes Harold would read to Uncle Billy about the Albigensians and Waldensians, the Hussites and the Montanists—the early Christians who, like these mountain Baptists of the South, had emigrated into the hills and forests to build their simple, God-fearing communities without popes and without kings. Harold read of the sixteenth-century German Anabaptists, the first recognizable ancestors of modern-day Baptists, whom some historians have called "the left wing of the Reformation." They were before Luther, and Luther, hating them because they believed in the right of every man to have his own farm and his own Bible, egged on the German princes to massacre them in the Peasants' War. Groups of Anabaptists under Thomas Munzer and Nicholas Storch, having no legal means of protest, seized whole cities and established them in a theocratic social order whose citizens held their worldly goods in common, according to that collective pattern of the primitive church where "distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."

After listening to these things Uncle Billy would say, "Well, son, that sounds jest fine. Would you mind puttin all that down on yore writin machine so I kin read it out from my pull-pit next Sunday?"

When Harold had pounded out Baptist history on the

typewriter for Uncle Billy, he would light the lantern and walk the old man home. In return Uncle Billy promised to make a chair with his own hands for our baby, and invited us to an all-day preaching and dinner on the grounds at Caney Fork church, come next fourth Sunday.

When our conversation led to the war and race riots in Detroit and New York's Harlem, Uncle Billy reminded us, "It ain't a mans' blood that counts. It's his seed. An I reckon there's good seed an bad seed in all the races the Lord made. Now the Word says that 'of one blood hath He created all the nations of the earth.' I love my African brothern an my Hebrew ones jest like the Word tells me to. I'm sorry I can't say that all my friends an neighbors round here think that."

Uncle Billy has found the universe in his own country, although he never went beyond the third grade in a one-room mountain schoolhouse and has never read much except the Bible and an occasional newspaper when it is given to him. We love him too, because he is one of the last representatives of a mountain Baptist sect which will become extinct with the passing of its remaining two or three hundred members. Every year one or two of the churches closes its doors because the members have died or moved away, and the vacant buildings are left to rot or are used by neighboring farmers to store their cow feed.

Forty years ago the Two-Seeders, who first became a distinct sect around 1750, still had congregations in Indiana, Illinois, Missouri and most of the Southern states. But in 1936 the unofficial head of the sect, Elder E. R. Little of McMinnville, Tennessee, reported for the Census of Religious Denominations only sixteen churches, divided into three cooperating associations in the Cumberland country of Kentucky and Tennessee. One church besides survives in the Alabama hills, and one or two more congregations which have long since lost contact with the rest of the denomina-

tion are peacefully breathing their last in the mountains of Arkansas.

The Baptist sects are like trees in a forest. Some, yielding to age and frost, die with their roots. Young saplings sprout up from the dead growth and from the underbrush, waiting to be chopped away by time and change. Thus it has been since the "Apostle of Religious Liberty," Roger Williams, founded the original Baptist commonwealth of Rhode Island in 1636; and three years later, at Providence, the first Baptist church in America.

In the last thirty years at least a dozen new Baptist sects have shot up from disputes over the Word, these in addition to the dozens of "independent" Baptist congregations which do not trace their ancestry from Roger Williams. The "free willers" won the argument over "free will" versus "predestination," leaving Uncle Billy's "foreordained folks" one of three small remaining groups in these hills.

But Baptists of all sects fought with other Americans in the great battles for freedom of conscience and free institutions which have molded our republic. Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington all acknowledged their indebtedness to the Baptists for their help in the War of Independence.

It was a minister of the emigrant German Baptists, or Plain People, in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, who supervised with his own hands the printing of the first drafts of the Declaration of Independence. A hundred years later emigrant Swedish Baptists were among the Scandinavian settlers who helped to shape the new commonwealths of Kansas, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Baptists first gave the terror-stricken Jews from Europe the right to build their places of worship with the full protection of the law. It is said that Roger Williams became a close friend of the learned Rabbi Saul Brown who founded

the old Jewish community at Newport, Rhode Island, in 1658.

Before the Civil War, Baptists served as conductors of the Underground Railroad, the Northern members of the church having split away from the Southern members on account of slavery. And in the second World War the Baptists in a dozen different countries of Europe fought for the Four Freedoms which have been their pillars of fire during all these generations of Baptists.

Uncle Billy had a right to be proud when we told him the traditions of his people. "Son, you talk like a home-made feller, jest as our country is a sort of home-made proposition when you start layin it off in yore mind. Next Sunday I'm gonna quote what you been tellin me, right long with the Word."

## CHAPTER X

### HARDSHELLERS AND BULL NETTLERS

"I had six saved up and that woman gave me two. Now we'll make it easy. Get your tooth brush, Sister Honey; we're going!"

"Stop waving those gas stamps at me. Where did you get them, and where are we going, and how will we get back?" Celia asked.

"Hurry up," I teased her. "That old Dessie woman gave me two stamps. If you're not ready to start after lunch, why I'll just take her with me to visit Great-Great-Grandad Martin's country. We're going to the Boston Mountains in Arkansas to visit with Sister Arilla at Baptist Ridge. How'll we get back? As easy as a piece of Sister Arilla's pie slides down your throat. My press card from Religious News Service will get me gas anywhere in a Lord-fearin old Baptist state like Arkansas."

"Brother," my woman answered, "I'm not worrying about gas. But you'd better get those branches on your family tree straight if you expect to land in Arkansas instead of Virginia."

"Well, that was Grandad Martin's youngest brother who married a Lankford and moved to Arkansas. All the others went to Kentucky and Tennessee or lit out for Texas," I explained.

Celia hauled down the overnight bag and began packing. An hour later, after we had left the baby at Ada Lee's, we were rolling down the Cumberlands and on our way to Baptist Ridge.

Now, if the Lord had His way, Baptist Ridge would be the happiest community in the Boston Mountains and Sister Arilla Lankford the perkier woman in Arkansas. "But all

them different kinds of Baptists on the Ridge, cept my kind over at Little Shiloh Church, is a-foller'n man's way an not the Lord's way," so that Sister Arilla is a right-sorrerin widder as she sees one neighbor after the other put into the stony ground before going on to Hell.

"I reckon Hell'll be fuller of Baptist an Baptist preachers caught on the wrong doctrine like a mess of catfish than it'll be crowded up with Methodists an Campbellites," she sighs as she pours a bucket of corn into the boiling hominy kettle.

Then she throws in a dipperful of wood ash. "Them kernels need wood ash like a Christian needs grace if they's gone to make good Arkansas hominy," she says, stirring the mixture with a bean pole. "I seen some runs of hominy that was like some runs of Baptists! they come out all swiveled up till they ain't fit fer the slop. You gotta have the right kind of kettle an the right kind of ashes to make mouth-tastin hominy. You gotta have the right kind of Baptist church an the right kind of doctrine to make heaven-fittin Baptists."

Sister Arilla dips a home-made wooden spoon into the mess and puts a speck of it on her tongue to see if the hominy has the right savor. She smacks her lips and rambles on.

"No, son, I ain't worryin no longer what the Lord'll do with my pore ol bones. They're Hardshell like that terrapin that's been a-roostin in my garden fer more'n thirty years, an the Devil can't crack em.

"The Lord ain't a-lettin no gen-u-wine Baptist fall from grace fore they goes on to glory. He ain't lettin no good Baptist widder go a-beggin their victuals ef they ain't got no menfolks to chop an hoe fer them. No sir.

"I knowed it was His grace aboundin that mornin I seen another Hardshell comin to my pore patch. We done got used to each other, me an that terrapin, I reckon. I plants the garden an gits the sass. That terrapin watches the garden an gits the bugs an cutworms. I reckon that's the way the Lord pervides fer both of us.



"No foxy ol Landmarker, hangin round when there's chicken a-brownin on the stove, is gone to fool us two Hardshells, the Lord helpin us. Them Landmarkers got a doctrine like a soft-shell egg laid by a lazy ol hen that ain't worth the dirt she pecks in. When you pick it up an look at it, it jest busts an smears up yore hand.

"Always a-claimin the Landmark church is the gen-u-wine Baptist church started by John the Baptist back in them bushes on Jordan River. Always ready to sop up hot biscuits an flour gravy with any neighbor who'll ask em to eat. But so close with what they got that they won't even let another Landmarker taste Lord's Supper with em less'n he's a member of their congregation.

"Same way with them other churches which strayed off from ol Baptist doctrine an keeps on callin theirselves Baptists. Makes me think of them bull nettles sproutin up in my garden ever summer an tryin to choke out my termaters. I'd be a purty sight ef I tried to can up bull nettles an tried to live on em through the winter. I'd be a drownin woman ef I tried to git across Jordan by trustin them fool things that all them bull-nettle Baptists thought up."

Sister Arilla was young and the spriest girl on Baptist Ridge when she came up shouting from the water at the baptizing in Sweet Briar Creek sixty years ago this summer. Since that time she has seen the members of her family one by one lose communion with the church of her fathers, the Primitive or Hardshell Baptist sect, dying like its members from old age and crankiness about newfangled things such as benches with backs or hymn books with round, instead of four-shaped notes.

Her husband had been turned out of the church for cussing Yankees long before a young mule kicked him in the ribs and killed him. Sister Arilla always gets down on her knees and prays an extra prayer for Stice Lankford when she remembers how stubborn-willful he looked, standing trial that windy

night in November. The Hardshell elders of Little Shiloh say that Stice's face was red like the Jonathan apples in his orchard, as he listened impatiently to the pleadings of Daddy Bennett, the church clerk.

"We ain't wantin to turn you out, Brother Lankford." Daddy Bennett's voice had the dry rustle of the last leaves falling this late November on Baptist Ridge. "Tain't that we got much use fer Yankees er any other furriners. But we done heard there's a right smart heap of Primitive Baptist Yankees who we'll have to shake hands with in Heaven. An the Lord done pinted out in His Book that we ain't to cuss nobody, but we's to bless them what cusses us."

Stice Lankford doubled his big fist and shook it in the faces of his brethren. "The Lord didn't never have to put up with a passel of dern-blasted damyankees stealin His fodder an killin His shoats, like us folks had to back in sixty-three. I ain't a-believin that no Yankee's got a soul worth savin even ef his mouth spits out doctrine like a grasshopper spits out terbacker juice."

Brother Lankford cleared his throat and puffed out his cheeks. He spat loudly on the dirt floor of Little Shiloh and limped out into the windy night.

Years after Daddy Bennett's trembling hand had crossed his name off the church roll, old Stice still hobbled along the cow trails of Baptist Ridge, cussing to the squirrels when he remembered the sting of Yankee bullets tearing into his flesh that morning on Lookout Mountain. He went no more to Little Shiloh Church, but come love-offering time every quarter he had Arilla hitch up old Pacer to the spring wagon and carry two bushels of potatoes to Elder Biggs, the preacher.

When his oldest girl, Maggie, jilted Elder Biggs' boy, Luther, for Bud Rutledge, a Separate Baptist who lived over at Cow Crossing, old Stice shouldered the musket his granddaddy had brought from Virginny and went after the couple.

"I'd plug a gal of mine atween the eyes like I'd plug a thievin Yankee afore I'd let her team up with any bunch of infidels that fellowships baby baptizers," he said starting down the rocky trail to the county seat. There he met the young couple on the main street just after Squire Ford Plumley had married them. When he aimed the gun straight at Bud Rutledge's heart, Maggie pulled the musket out of his hands as easily as she had once taken rags and bark from the mouths of her younger sisters. "You won't give us yore blessin, Pa," she laughed, "but you're gone to give us this as a keepsake."

She handed the musket to her husband, and they left old Stice cussing to the jeering crowd which had gathered in the public square. Finally Sheriff Tut Kinney, a United Baptist, came along leading a saddled mule. He grabbed Stice Lankford by the shoulders, hoisted him on the saddle, and admonished, "Git on home to Aunt Arilla, Uncle Stice. The law books don't give a Hardsheller no more right to stand around cussin good folks than they do a Landmarker or Two-Seeder. Jest turn the mule loose when you git there. He'll head straight fer his oats."

Two years later Stice's favorite child, Marthy, slipped out and hitched up with the Free-Will Baptist preacher, Rufe Hardmore. When the old man opened his mouth to cuss about this, he collapsed in his big chair by the fireplace. There he sat for days, nursing his rheumatism and his grief, speaking to no one but Arilla and letting his copies of the county paper stack up unread on the front-room table. Arilla's hair started turning its present shade of gray that spring, and Sunday nights mocked Stice with the memory of Marthy's voice singing in the Free-Will Baptist choir across the creek.

Once his eyes brightened when Arilla handed him a cup of some dewberry wine she had made to spry him up. He took one sip, gurgled and spat the juice on the iron firedogs. "Wife, don't never hand me nary nother cup of wine," he growled. "Them Free-Willers done dee-filed the Lord's cup

an the Lord's wine by lettin any ol Methodist er Campbellite trash drink it in communion with em. We brung up our gal not to drink the cup with any folks but real Lord-fearin ol Baptists. Now she's a-partakin of the dee-filement an'll have to answer to the Lord fer it."

His jaws clamped down like horse teeth over a bit when a neighbor told him that Marthy's new-born son was the spittin image of his grandpa.

"Bastard Baptist," he grunted, "an no bastard's foreordained to git into Heaven. Free-Willers teach that the Lord got hisself kilt by them Pharisees so he could save jest anybody who come along. The Word don't say no such thing. It says that the Lord come down jest to save the e-lect in the one true church, them that was already marked fer glory fore they ever started hatchin out in their ma's bellies."

Eyes bloodshot and mouth churning with saliva, old Stice concluded, "Marthy's bastard ain't no part of Stice Lankford. It's foreordained to be burnt up in a bastard church that the Lord's gone to burn up with all the bastards in it." Shocked into silence, the neighbor hurried off as old Stice bit his tongue till the blood mixed with the foam in his mouth.

Sister Arilla, puttering over her hominy, is glad that Stice had been gone six years next crop time when Luritha, the youngest girl, slipped away and married into that Two-Seed trash over in Logan's Bottom.

"I reckon my ol man hated them Two-Seeders he called Snake Baptists worse'n that ol sarpint they's always a-talkin bout," she says; "that snake that done wiggled up to Eve with an apple in his mouth back in Eden times. Stice let on that them Two-Seeders got forked tongues like snakes fer talkin but that pore woman who was the mammy of us all. Always a-claimin that Eve had seeds of the snake an seeds of the Lord in her; that you're foreordained to fry ef you got some of her snake seed an that you're foreordained to

sing in glory ef you're from the seed of the Lord what got planted in her.

"Stice said the Snake Baptists twisted up that there doctrine of foreordination so much that they done twisted theirselves right into Hell. Us ol Baptists gits that doctrine out of the mouth of the Lord, an not out of the mouth of some ol copperhead curled up on a plum tree when you're out pickin a mess to jell up fer winter.

"I figger that the ol sarpint's got plenty of Two-Seed snakes an plenty of two-legged ones to snap an pizen Lord-fearin ol Baptists. Them two-legged snakes is the reason why there's a dozen different kinds of Baptists right here on Baptist Ridge. When Stice's granddaddy built the first cabin here on the ridge, there wasn't but one kind of Baptist here an they was called Reg'lar Baptists. Them was days when Baptist loved Baptist. Come summertime, messengers'd show up at Association meetin from Baptist churches in seven counties. They'd barbecue two oxen an swaller ever smidgen of em fore the sun went down. Then they'd set up till long past midnight shoutin an foot-pattin while one preacher after t'other laid down the Word.

"Them Reg'lar Baptists wasn't fightin Baptists. Foreordination er Free-Will Baptist believed like he pleased jest so he didn't drink the cup with Methodists, jest so he shared his side meat an his syrup bucket with his neighbors. That was what they was like when Granddaddy Lankford brought a whole bunch of em down from Virginny. They settled down an named this place Baptist Ridge cause they found plenty of water here fer baptizins an foot-washins.

"Back in Virginny they was friends of Mr. Tom Jefferson who got to be President. I heard Stice tell of how them Baptists helped Mr. Jefferson pass a law to stop the state from payin wages to them Piscopalian she-preachers with their col-lars turned back'ards.

"But I reckon the good Lord didn't mean fer Baptists to have any more peace this side of Jordan than my ol man used to have when his melons turned ripe in July. Twant long fore a bunch of them New Lighters callin theirselves Separate Baptists moved in from Kaintucky an took up homesteads long the Ridge. They had a big log-raisin an built a church down the holler from Little Shiloh Church that the Reg'lar Baptists had put up fore they cut down a tree to clear a field. Claimed the Lord give em a new light the Reg'lar Baptists didn't git. Said thet was why they't split off an called theirselves Separate Baptists. Grandaddy Lankford said the new light came from the Devil's kindlin pile of lost sinners when he heard they took in baby baptizers an let men who hadn't never been licensed er ordained stand up an preach.

"Then the Free-Will Baptists come in from North Car'liny an after them the Landmakers from down close to the Texas line. But the real ol Baptists at Little Shiloh kep on in the Lord-fearin way without any ruckuses till jest afore the Civil War. Then ol man Isaac Plumley, him what was High Sheriff Ford's grandaddy, started foller'n after them fancy town Baptists what was startin them man-made missionary societies an bringin in them organs fer some gal with jiggin legs an a powdered face to make a racket on. A few folks who'd made money storekeepin an outswappin their neighbors jined in with him.

"Grandaddy Lankford an the Lord-fearin Baptists had nothin jinglin in their pockets to start tradin with the Devil fer them newfangled ideas. Way they read the Word, ef a man felt called on to preach to the heathen in Chiny an them furrin places, he oughta put his Bible in his saddlebag an git goin. They couldn't find nary one word bout organs in the church neither. Grandaddy Lankford said Lord-fearin Baptists didn't need to go puttin out good money fer some sinful

contraption, rigged up by the Ol Scratch, when they wanted to hist praises to the Lord.

"One week ol man Isaac Plumley hitched up his span of ox, traipsed over to Little Rock an loaded a shiny new organ in the back of his wagon. The day they set up that organ in church Grandaddy Lankford an the Lord-fearin Baptists walked home fer a little spell an came back a-bringin their axes. They chopped the organ up so fine you couldn'ta made kindlin wood out of it. They'da hung ol man Isaac Plumley an all them other organ-histers, but the bell rope they took down was rotten. Besides, it was the Sabbath.

"Well, ol man Isaac an the rest bought theirselves a new organ an started what they called a Missionary Baptist Church jest off the square at the county seat. The Devil'd done dragged his tail into Little Shiloh an wrecked its peace. A few of us held on an we saw plain that the Lord'd foreordained some to be saved in the ol church jest like he'd foreordained the many to be lost in them other churches. We jined up with associations of other ol Baptists who was callin theirselves Primitive Baptists.

"But there was some who'd stayed who dropped out then cause they wanted to keep the name of Reg'lar Baptists an cause they didn't believe in foreordination even ef they'd helped chop up that organ. They pulled off an built theirselves a church down in the cove. Right after that Elder Dan'l Parker came through from Texas, preachin the Two-Seed doctrine, an half of Little Shiloh turned Snake Baptist.

"All them Baptists what'd strayed off started callin us faithful ol Baptists Hardshells an we started callin em Bull-nettlers. Them Bullnettlers kep on splittin an splittin till they done split their souls, tryin to serve the Lord with their faith an the Devil with their works."

Time stops and takes a long rest when it crosses Baptist Ridge. Years are as lazy and unhurried as the clouds waiting

their Maker's command to dip down and take Lord-fearin old Baptists up to glory. For Baptist Ridge is far closer to Canaan than it is to Little Rock. From Sister Arilla's cabin to that mansion where old Stice waits for her in a golden rocker is the distance of the nearest cloud hanging over the green thicket. From that cabin to Little Rock is many miles of bumpy, hot road, leading to the juke boxes and the picture shows where the Ol Sarpint sits waitin with his fangs a-slobberin fer them with lustful eyes an jiggin toes.

Because Canaan is so close, the Lord's feudin Baptists talk much more about the politics of Canaan than they do about the politics of that wicked, unsanctified domain which lies at the end of the cow trails leading down Baptist Ridge. Wars and laws and tariffs may come and go in that raw, bleeding world where men wage the everlasting wars of the flesh without the Baptist shield of the spirit. Baptist Ridge hears and cares little about these unhappy, far-off things.

But its very rocks echo every issue which troubles the smaller world of good Baptists. Those who still called themselves Regular Baptists split forty years ago when Deacon Oscar Clay let his girl, Carrie, marry young Ford Plumley, brought up in the Missionary Baptists. Deacon Clay's friends who approved joined with a faction of the Separate Baptists to form the United Baptists. Ford Plumley wasn't running for High Sheriff then, so he joined the United Baptists to please his pretty wife. But he always drops into the Missionary Baptist Church of his childhood a time or two before election day.

Only last summer the Separate Baptists on the Ridge threw stones like cannon balls into a camp meeting of the new Pentecostal Baptists, as they danced and stuttered in the Unknown Tongue. The Pentecostal Baptist preacher led his congregation with jugs of kerosene to every creek on the Ridge. All that summer the Separate Baptist clan had to put off its baptizins for fear that the borned agin would git



pized on that coal oil when they went down to meet their Lord in the water.

Winter before last old Elder Simms, the Two-Seed preacher, got bit by a pine rattler and died a-swellin in the woods. "That Snake Baptist done got what he's always a-spoutin bout," Sister Arilla commented when she heard of the Elder's death. Then she put on her bonnet and went over to help Baptists of all the other rival sects lay out the old man for burial.

The day of the funeral she picked a big bouquet of flowers and put them on the Elder's coffin. "You'd better come home with me, Fernie," she said, putting her arm around Widow Simms when the last clods were piled on the long wooden box there in the Two-Seed churchyard. "It's a cold day fer a woman when her man turns cold."

## CHAPTER XI

### BAPTIZIN ON WILDCAT RIVER

The spell of Baptist Ridge was still upon us as we rolled along the washed-out Arkansas roads, our car loaded with enough food to supply a whole army of Baptists. The members of each warring sect had turned out to meet us, and each brother or sister had brought something, from a jar of preserves to a salted-down possum. The Free-Will Baptists were without a preacher, what with Rufe Hardmore going away to Memphis to take a job in a defense plant so he could lay by for his wife and six young-uns. The Free-Willers had brought us half a pig and the plea that I serve as their minister till Brother Rufe could come back to his orphan flock.

"Brother, we knowed you had the call, like all the Martin connection, when we heerd you talk Baptist doctrine in our little church house," old Elder Tate Archer had said to me. And to persuade me further he had it all figured out on a sheet of tablet paper that we were seventh cousins on the Lankford side. "I reckon you an me both is some kin to jest bout ever'body round here," he concluded.

It had been hard to say no to kinfolks and to leave this world of pine thickets and growing corn for our world of telephones and typewriters, rationed tires and crowded tourist camps. But already our good friends on the Ridge had kept us overlong, and next Sunday we were due for a baptizing of the Regular Baptists on Wildcat River in Indiana, where we were to meet Uncle Ike Burden.

Uncle Ike Burden, the infidel, pulled in his fishing line and spat cuss words when the six deacons showed up to clean out the baptizin hole. "Damn blast it," he grumbled as he fled

into the woods. "Them hell-fired water-lappers is ruinin the best fishin places on Wildcat River. Jest when the fish is commencin to bite good them sons-o-Baptists show up and scare every damn last minnow out of Indianny. Claim water is a sign they been cleaned up from what they calls their sins. Water cleans plaguin Baptists like Baptists grow fins, or my name ain't Ike Burden."

The six deacons had the proud look of men who have taken a fortress. "Uncle Ike won't scandalize Christian people no more by comin here and fishin on the sabbath," promised Deacon Kirk who owned this scrap of land. "Regular Baptists need regular baptizin places. I'm deedin this land and this piece of river front to the congregation. Ike Burden can't come here trespassin with the Devil no more. No sir."

"Sixty-seven tithe-payin sinners to be buried in the watery grave and come up born again on Sabbath tomorrow." Deacon Hill, the church treasurer, reckoned up the catch of souls in the revival as Uncle Ike counted his fish.

"Rance Hays come over last night and confessed about that bunch of fryers he stole out of my hen house ten years ago," chuckled Deacon Parr. 'Rance', I said, 'there ain't no resurrection fer dead chickens. An there ain't no retribution without restitution.'"

"Wade in, brothers, wade in," boomed Deacon Kane. "Roll up your pants an let's clean out this baptizin hole so redeemed sinners won't have to git scrubbed in dirty water."

"Feels as cool as it did when I used to slip off from school an come here swimmin," said Deacon Long striding out into the river. "Damn! Lord forgive," said Deacon Brown as his bare foot hit a sharp rock. "Watch your language, brother," cautioned Deacon Kane. "Twould be a mighty pore example to the just born-again to church a deacon for cussin."

Uncle Ike Burden, the infidel, stopped his ears to keep from hearing the splashing in the water as he cut down the trail leading through the woods to his farm. A chattering

squirrel dropped an acorn on his bare head where it landed with a pop. "Drat you," Uncle Ike yelled at the squirrel laughing at him from an overhanging limb. "You got so little sense they oughta make you a deacon in the Baptist Church."

He turned in his gate and down the cobblestone walk bordered by calla lilies. "Keep on movin, Ike Burden," boomed Aunt Nancy out of her two hundred pounds. "I'm sewin my baptizin dress and I ain't got no business cookin dinners for infidels. If you want to eat, go chew on them blasphemous books of Tom Paine and Bob Ingersoll you got hid out in the woods. Come back when you got grace in your heart, and you can have victuals in your stomach."

Uncle Ike turned and slammed the gate, cussing wives and Baptists all the way to the home of his niece, Mrs. Deacon Lee, who fried up a mess of fish and boiled him a couple of eggs.

Over at Deacon Kane's where we were boarding, Amanda, the youngest girl, put the final frills and tucks in a piece of white voile. The girl had the exalted, far-away look of the ransomed as she threaded the bobbin and pressed the treadle of the sewing machine which had been a wedding gift to her mother. "Bless God," said Sister Kane above the whirl of the wheels, "that machine sewin up her baptizin dress sounds like the harp her fingers goin to tune up in glory when we all get there." Amanda blushed as red as the apples growing in the front yard when her mother continued, "I reckon religion is a good thing for a young girl to put in her hope chest along with the doilies and bedspreads she's been packin in since Bob Landrum started walkin her home from young people's meetin."

That night Sister Kane seemed worried as she cooked the vegetables for supper. Her spoon stopped in midair over a pot of mashed potatoes and her warm, homey face had a

worried look. "I keep on wishin my oldest girl would be here tomorrow to see her baby sister buried with the Lord at the baptizin. Vera's a good girl who could have married a man with the best farm in this county. But she always wanted to be a missionary and went off to Chicago to study in the Bible Institute. Reckon she'd have stayed in the Baptist way if they hadn't sent the Institute girls out to pray and sing in the saloons. Last time I heard of her was when a neighbor boy saw her workin in one of them taxi dance places down on Clark Street. You two are travelin folks. Maybe you'll try to find my girl when you go to Chicago and tell her that her mother is still prayin for her."

The kitchen door opened and Deacon Kane walked, dripping water and faith in the same generous quantities. "Don't worry company about Vera, Honey," he said gently. "Baptists may get off the big road, but Baptists can't fall from grace and Baptists ain't never lost. Maybe, if the Lord had a plan for the prodigal son who finally went back to his daddy, the Lord has a plan for our daughter. Maybe we just ain't too sharp when it comes to figurin out the Lord's way."

Deacon Kane's words were those of a man who is sure of the corn he plants in his fields and of the children he plants in his home. He changed the subject, chuckling. "Come across Tom Piper prayin out in the woods when I was comin home. Never seen a man git a bigger dose of religion than Tom since he gambled away every blessed acre of the farm his daddy left him. He was kneelin down there on the moss, talkin faster than that tobacco auctioneer on the radio. Promised the Lord he'd tear up every deck of cards so that his hand would never know a jack from a king."

Long after midnight we could still hear Sister Kane and Amanda bustling around to get the girl's baptism clothes ready for the great day.

The next Sunday, walking with the family toward the baptizin hole, we realized something that had been shaping

in our minds ever since Deacon Kane took us into his home. We had come here to get acquainted with another little sect. But we came to know much more—a way of living in which all the elements harmonized to make a pattern.

Maybe the Lord of the golden meadows and the tall silos had so ordered that union of land with people when the first Regular Baptists came from England into the colonies, and finally into Indiana. It had been a long time, as men measure years, since these ripe acres had first known the baptism of the plow. Generations of oaks and poplars had grown up with generations of Kanes and Pipers, each sinking deep roots in the Indiana earth.

Now we knew that Amanda's baptism and her hope chest were as natural expressions of the life pattern as the waving corn or the new leaves put out by the trees. Now we knew why Vera Kane had changed character when she shifted her roots to Chicago. Would one of these oak trees, shading the baptizin hole, keep on growing if it were pulled up and transplanted to the pavements of Clark Street?

"Here we are," Deacon Kane said. "Baptizin hole's clean enough to wash off Judas Iscariot, let alone Tom Piper. Got out every stick and stone that might cut a poor sinner's head when he went under. But you'd need all the water in Wildcat River and ten men holdin him to scrub the Devil off Ike Burden. Then he'd come up grabbin a catfish and makin the water smoke with his cussin."

The buzz of dragonflies and neighborly gossip merged in the lazy air. Men shook hands and stood around in little circles under the trees discussing the price of hogs at the Chicago stockyards. Women kissed each other loudly and stopped in the middle of a sentence to chastise an unruly child. Uncle Ike chatted amiably enough with Deacon Kirk about the chances of Wendell Willkie, over at Elwood, to be the next President. Amanda slipped off to join a group of young girls

dressed in white and standing self-consciously on a corner of the bank.

Tom Piper came over and shook hands with us gravely. "Happiest day of my life," he said. "I was comin home from a two days' poker game when I passed by the church and took a notion to stop in. When they started singing 'Just As I Am,' I heard the Lord tellin me to go down just as I was. I've burnt up all but one deck of cards which I can't find. They'll go in the stove soon as the Lord shows me where I put em."

The local preacher arrived, wearing a combination suit of overalls and rubber boots. He stepped into the middle of the river and faced the crowd, now reverently quiet. He bowed his head, said a short prayer, then nodded to the choir which stood with open books near us. They sang a verse of an old Baptist hymn, and the crowd joined in the chorus:

"On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,  
And cast a wishful eye  
To Canaan's fair and happy land  
Where my possessions lie.

"I am bound for the Promised Land,  
I am bound for the Promised Land,  
Oh, who will come and go with me?  
I am bound for the Promised Land."

The preacher raised his hand over the water. "Cross on over, children," he said softly but audibly. "Cross on over the river and go with Jesus to the Promised Land."

The choir began another verse of the hymn as several contingents, including the group of young girls, moved from different directions toward the little path to the river. A girl whose bold face was a spasm of ecstasy waded into the stream, and the preacher held her tightly around the waist. "Upon the confession of thy faith and by the authority of

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, I now baptize thee, my sister. Amen!"

He plunged the girl swiftly under the water, then raised her, wet and dripping, so that the thin white dress showed every curve of her round breasts and full hips. A couple of boys near us nudged each other and one whispered, "There goes our good time. We'd better start lookin for something else." The girl saw the leering faces of the boys as she waded out and began crying hysterically. The boys exchanged shamed glances and were departing silently when a woman came forward to wrap a long gray blanket around the girl.

The preacher baptized candidates alternately from each group as the crowd continued to sing old hymns that have guided millions of Baptists into green pastures beyond waters stiller than those of Wildcat River at baptizin time. Some of the redeemed walked out of the baptizin hole with numbed, set faces, like people who have felt what they cannot tell. Others had the proud, exalted look of those who would declare all before the world. But every dripping, washed-up sinner was cried and laughed over by friends and kinsmen, offering comfort for his wet, shaking body with warm, kindly words.

Sister Kane sniffed into her new lace handkerchief when Amanda walked demurely into the river. Other girls had lifted their skirts and exposed patches of thigh when the water flowed over their stocking tops. Amanda's hands never touched her dress as she walked in easy gentle steps that barely rippled the waters. There seemed only a slight splash as the preacher said the words and Amanda came up blushing, dropping her eyes when she faced her neighbors.

We saw Bob Landrum shove ahead of her parents. "Hand me the blanket," he said commandingly to Sister Kane. He wrapped the heavy cloth around the soaked dress and then looked straight into the eyes of Deacon Kane. "Next time Amanda stands up before a preacher, she's standin up with



me," he said, "We've waited long enough for you to make up your mind."

There was a deep murmur from the crowd when Tom Piper stepped into the water and walked with long, determined strides toward the preacher who gave him his hand. Then Tom turned toward the bank and said, "Neighbors, will you sing 'Happy Day' as I obey my Lord?"

Their voices rose:

"O happy day that fixed my choice  
On Thee, my Saviour and my God!  
Well may this glowing heart rejoice  
And tell its raptures all abroad.

"Happy day, happy day,  
When Jesus washed my sins away."

As the crowd finished, the preacher pronounced the baptismal words and lowered Tom Piper into the water. Then a loud laugh swept from the bank and across the squat, echoing hills on the other side of Wildcat River. The rocks and trees were laughing with the neighbors at Tom Piper. The gambler's eardrums were throbbing from the laughter and the water rushing into his head as the preacher hastily lifted him by the shoulders. He opened his eyes to see a soggy mess of cards whirling in a little eddy around preacher and penitent. Two jacks were playing tag with a pair of queens plastered to the preacher's waist, while the joker grinned from Tom Piper's shirt.

"Tom's found his missin deck of cards," Deacon Kane managed to say. "They was in his hip pocket all the time."

The preacher raised his hand high for silence. "Folks," he said mildly, "the Word says our old man is crucified with the Lord when we go down into the water and that we come up walkin with Him in newness of life. That won't be the old man, Tom Piper, you'll shake hands with in a minute when he comes out of the water. It'll be Tom Piper who's been

crucified and is walkin in newness of life. Tom Piper's sins are floatin down Wildcat River so they won't bother him any more. And so are his playin cards."

The preacher had barely finished speaking when a whooping hallelujah came from the bank, followed by a splash that sprayed water in his face and that of the gambler. "Here I come to get crucified like Tom Piper!" howled Aunt Nancy Burden, half walking, half dog-paddling into the river. "I've been waitin for thirty years, trying to git Ike Burden to come with me. Now I can't wait any longer. Hallelujah, preacher, Hallelujah! Wash this old carcass till it'll be whiter'n snow."

She clutched the preacher by the neck, pulling him down under the water, while big billows rolled over Tom Piper. Tom grabbed the old woman by her arms and pulled her up with the spluttering preacher still locked in her stranglehold.

"Take it a bit easy, Aunt Nancy," Tom cautioned, prying her hands loose from the preacher's neck. "You can't get to Heaven if you drown the man who's showin you the way."

The preacher carefully placed his hands on his face and head, saw they were whole and said kindly, "It's not your turn, Sister Burden, but I guess the Lord wouldn't want me to keep somebody waitin who was that anxious. Just stand still a minute and we'll get it done."

As he placed his arm gingerly around Aunt Nancy's shoulder and began the words, there was a shrill call from the bank. "Hey, wait a minute! I'm goin wherever my old lady's goin. Yes sir, I'm comin, Nancy and Lord Jesus. Lord have mercy on this old heathen who's been livin as bull-headed as a yearlin calf on its way to be butchered." Uncle Ike dashed into the water and splashed toward his wife, while shouts of thanksgiving, louder than the laugh at Tom Piper, rang from the shore.

Uncle Ike grabbed Aunt Nancy, smacked her on the lips, then turned to the crowd. "Neighbors, you all know old Ike

Burden, the infidel who caught fish in this baptizin hole. Well, fishin makes a man think about what's happened and what's goin to happen. Now I've been thinkin that most of them early apostles was fishermen. And I'll take the words of fishermen that they knew what they was talkin about.

"I'm comin down here to git baptized and to git saved. You'll never see me slippin off to go fishin here on Sunday. No sir, but I'm tellin you like them, early fishermen told their neighbors: All of you that ain't saved come on down here and get it tended to before another sun goes down on your sorry heads. Come on! Come on! Come on now or be pestered by Ike Burden every day of your lives."

The people still waiting to be baptized stampeded into the water, waving their arms and crying, laughing and singing snatches of hymns as they surged around the preacher.

"Stand back, folks! Stand back so I can get to everybody, commanded the minister. "Lord, what a great day for Baptists!"

It was sundown before the last penitent had been redeemed in the atoning waters of Wildcat River. Tired, happy people moved toward home and evening chores in trucks, automobiles and on foot. The Kanes walked ahead, and Uncle Ike fell in step beside us.

"How does it feel to be a converted infidel, Uncle Ike?" Celia asked.

"Right good! Right good!" He puffed on his pipe for a minute, then added, "Now I've been baptized, I guess I can still fish in that hole when Deacon Kirk deeds it over to the congregation. A little water don't hurt a man no more'n it hurts a fish. If you go in a dry devil, you'll come out a wet devil. That's all."

## CHAPTER XII

### FOOTWASHIN' AT LITTLE HURRICANE

"This has turned out to be gas-ration instead of footwashing Sunday," I remarked the morning we had planned to go to Little Hurricane Church thirty miles away.

"Couldn't we borrow a few gallons on next month's ration?" Harold suggested.

"Might as well try to borrow a little grace from an infidel," I said. "Well, no footwashing for us today."

"No footwashing for us today," Harold echoed glumly.

Jeremiah, our yellow cat, jumped from the open attic door to the porch. The baby saw the cat bounce down a few feet from his play pen and laughed, breaking our bad mood. We had just stretched out our legs in the home-made chairs, reconciling ourselves to a Sunday in our log cabin, when a small truck rattled up to the gate.

A man stuck his head out of the cab. "This the Preece place?"

"Yes, sir," Harold yelled back, walking to the gate.

"Maggie Carter, my fourth cousin from Beech Grove, told me bout you folks," the man drawled. "She said how you all met up on the bus goin to Nashville an that you'd like to come to the footwashin today. Les Haley's my name, an this is my wife Clara."

By this time I had come to the gate, and Harold introduced me to these Tennessee angels who had come to carry us to Little Hurricane. Five children were shoving each other around in the back of the truck, and Clara turned to them. "Hush yoreselves now. Juanita, you take Terrell on yore lap an keep him out of mischief. Les Junior," she spoke to the

five-year-old on her lap, "you kin git in the back too. That'll make room fer Mister and Mis' Preece up in front."

"Get our lunch quick, Honey," Harold said, "so we won't keep our friends waiting."

I flew to the side door and grabbed the zipper bag off the ice box. I loaded in cake, fruit, lettuce, tomatoes, bread and fried chicken. Bag in hand, I went through the house to the front door and gave Allie instructions for the day.

David was still waving his arms from the play pen, begging to be taken along, when we squeezed into the narrow cab. "You shore have a purty baby," Clara remarked. "He's our only one," I replied.

Mrs. Haley stared at me incredulously, showing the gaping holes left by teeth that had never been replaced. "Well, I dee-clare," she said, and I felt the subtle reproach in her voice. "I've birthed nine and buried three."

"Hope we didn't put you out very much," Harold said as we moved along.

"Twas nothing at all," Mr. Haley assured him. "We're jest a piece off this here road out of Jellico. We live there right back of the picture show. Been coal minin there an at Whitwell fer twenty-three years. Started out with my dad puttin in fourteen hours a day when I was fourteen years old." As if to prove it, two moles with cores of hardened black coal dust stood out on his face which was seamed like a vein of coal.

We turned off the paved highway down a graveled side road. "Main highway's bein fixed from here on out," Mr. Haley explained, "so we'll have to go by this road which winds round Sunset Rock. It may be rough travelin but my ol grandad woulda been mighty thankful to have one like it under his feet. He used to walk down the Nickajack Trail across them hills over yander to go to footwashin. Reckon it done took him a good three days an nights to git there, climbin up an down that trail them Indians tramped out.

"Us folks oughta git there in another hour. This here lil ol truck ain't much to look at. But, as I'm always a-tellin my ol lady, where'd we be without it?"

"Celia and I would be sitting around the house wishing for gas," Harold laughed. "We sure appreciate your stopping by for us."

"Oh, don't mind that none," Les answered. "Why, I musta picked up a good twenty men in this here wagon the night we had that lynchin at Estill Springs. Ef ever a nigger had a good burnin comin to him, it was that one. Yes sir-ree, he got started fer Hell good an hot." Les Haley gleamed with satisfaction.

I felt ill, seeing in my mind every twitch of that tortured man, bound to the stake at Estill Springs while a mob of drooling white faces sniffed his burning flesh as if he were a pig being served up for a Southern barbecue. Possibly this man had been a Baptist, like so many of those who ran him down with bloodhounds and brought him back to be burned. But color lines are even tighter than denominational lines in the Deep South, and Christians of the white Baptist sects have no communion with their black Baptist brethren.

We sat in tense silence after Les told how the Negro had still protested his innocence of the rape charges even when the fire had reduced his hands, rough and calloused from cotton picking, to ashes. Finally Mrs. Haley said, "That ol Jimson woman was never right in her mind, pore ol thing. She was always a-walkin them roads day an night, tellin ever'body she met that this one an that one was doin her dirt. I believe to my soul that the nigger never touched her, but that liquor-drunk man of hern made it up on him an made her say the nigger done it."

Les gave Clara a hard, reproving look and changed the subject. "Reckon Sister Maggie Carter'll be bringin some of them Baptists from the Franklin County Association agin this year?" he ventured.

"She's a proud un to bring together all them folks," Clara answered easily, ignoring that look which would probably mean a quarrel when the two got home. "Sister Maggie holds by the ol ways of the Baptist Church of Christ. Lots of the churches has quit footwashin cause the young folks think its old-timey an makes em look funny. Some of the churches has even drawed out of our associations an lined up with that high-falutin Southern Baptist Convention. My own cousin got his call to preach in Little Hurricane Church. Now he's pastorin one of them convention churches, drawin two hundred an fifty dollars a month fer preachin jest what a lot of well-to-do folks wanta hear."

"Bible says there'll be a great fallin away in the last days," Les consoled her. "Says many will be called but only a few chosen. That cousin of yorn wouldn'ta strayed off with them Convention Baptists ef he had been willin to keep on earnin his livin by the sweat of his brow like the rest of our preachers. But he likes to write out a check when he pays fer his groceries an he likes to be called Reverend when the newspapers write him up."

We drove by the usual Tennessee cabins, some clapboard, others split log, none of them painted. People waved to us and we waved back. Les took a sharp turn to the right and the truck rumbled across a plank bridge. "Lil Hurricane Creek," he commented. "Few minutes an we'll be there."

On a little lane, wagons, cars and trucks were parked for half a mile around a rectangular, cedar-board church. As we pulled up to an open space a swarm of the Haleys' Baptist friends crowded around their truck. "What would a footwashin be without Les Haley an his family?" a rugged mountain farmer called out. "Preacher Cherry's been a-wonderin when you'd git here."

Les opened the door and jumped out. "What'd a footwashin be without Elder Buster Skinner?" he laughed, slapping the farmer on the back. "Howdy, Buster. Is Grandma still about?"

"She ain't much, Brother Les," Elder Skinner replied, nibbling a piece off his plug of tobacco, "specially in this hot weather. She told me, 'Son, tell them Duck River Baptists I've got my feet turned in the ol Baptist way, even ef I ain't strong nough to come down an git em washed fore they start walkin into Heaven.'"

"Bless her ol heart," said Les. "She's a mother in Israel ef a Baptist woman ever was. I'll never forgit how she took them three little Crosby young-uns an raised em when their ma didn't git over that cancer in her tongue. I reckon there ain't nobody in these hills who ain't still got the taste of Grandma Skinner's blackberry cobbler in his mouth."

Clara unloaded the children from the back of the truck, and we stood about uncertainly as Les greeted more Baptists. Suddenly he remembered us. "Scuse me, folks," he apologized. "Seein friends at footwashin wunst a year makes me fergit myself."

"This is Mr. and Mis' Preece," he said, as we shook hands with Baptists from Little Hurricane, Mount Olivet, Big Creek, Bethany, Noah's Fork, Chestnut Ridge and several other communities of the Duck River section. Harold's face lit up when he saw a faded woman coming toward us. "This is Mrs. Carter whom I met on the bus," he told me. "We wouldn't be here today if she hadn't written to Mr. Haley, asking him to pick us up."

"We surely thank you," I responded, shaking hands with Mrs. Carter. "You'll have to come over and eat dinner with us before long."

This was not our first contact with Mrs. Carter. For weeks she had been sending us pamphlets containing the minutes of the Duck River Baptist Association, principal unit of that gradually declining body, the Baptist Church of Christ, whose arteries have hardened like the arteries of faithful Grandma Skinner.

As the church bell tolled, the wide doors swung open and



the crowd walked inside. Sister Carter introduced me to Preacher Cherry who stood near the door. When we had sat down, she whispered confidentially, "These folks ain't Baptists, but I reckon they's good Christians. An they might git to be good Baptists ef they stay round Duck River long nough."

The church was long and very narrow with only a single row of pinewood benches on either side. A neat white cloth, with a cross embroidered over a crown, covered the unpainted altar on the raised platform. The older children sat in the rear, boys on the left, girls on the right. Women leaned over babes in arms to swap invitations for visits.

When Brother Cherry stood up before them, the pleasant low murmur of voices ceased. "Brother Haley will lead us in prayer," he said. "Let all Christians come up and kneel down with him."

Harold and I kept our places, bowing our heads, while a few neighbors who had remained behind knelt by their seats. All the rest knelt in the space in front of the platform and their voices joined Brother Haley, who, I was forced to remember, could also lynch a Negro. Lynching and praying had been set patterns of the South. I prayed that the young, straying from the Baptist Church of Christ into more modern denominations, would also change their attitude toward the black man.

After the prayer the congregation returned to their seats for the first hymn. When it was over, Brother Cherry lifted his round, heavy-set body over the pulpit.

"Brothers an sisters, I thank our Lord fer sparin us an lettin us come together fer fellership an the sacrament of footwashin ever year. They's them what's sinned an them what's lived wicked since last year when we had footwashin at Little Hurricane. But the Word says that He's faithful an jest to forgive us our sins an cleanse us from all un-rijusness ef we jest fess up to Him. That's the hope of Bap-

tists an only Baptists kin be sure of that hope, although I ain't sayin the Lord won't let in other kinds of Christians who never had no chance to learn Baptist teachin. But, brother er sister, ef you're seekin salvation an ain't in the Baptist Church, you're livin in a house built on the sand. The Word says a house built on the sand will shore be carried away by the storm, but a house built on the rock'll take mighty tough thunder. Mighty tough thunder.

"Well, when the Lord was a-talkin bout them houses built on the sand, He meant all them churches that ain't built on the Bible. But the house built on the rock means the Baptist Church which the Lord jined when John the Baptist baptized Him and made Him a member of it. Then the Lord done told Peter, 'On this rock I will build my church.' He couldn'ta meant anything, Christian friends, but that He was gone to build up the church He'd already jined. Jest don't make sense that our Lord'd want to build up the Methodists er Campbellites when He'd already jined the Baptists."

"They probably need to beat the trees for a few proselytes," I thought as Harold and I fidgeted under Preacher Cherry's gaze like disobedient children. Then someone rose at the back, cleared a rasping throat, and the worshipers' gaze was mercifully turned from us to a dried-up shell of a woman standing in the aisle. "Brother Cherry," she piped, "I want to sing that ol song bout Wicked Polly." Brother Cherry seemed annoyed, but Mrs. Carter looked pityingly at the old woman, then tapped her head in a meaningful gesture to us.

"All right," the preacher said resignedly. "Don't know as we could rightly have a footwashin at Little Hurricane ef Aunt Florence didn't sing 'Wicked Polly.'"

Aunt Florence stood before the congregation, and her voice was like a buzz saw cutting into dry logs as she sang. We recognized her song as one of the gruesome religious ballads left over from past centuries when all professing Christians took their brimstone straight. The dismal words told the

story of a young girl named Polly who had frolicked away her day of grace and now lay on her death bed talking to her sorrowing Christian mother:

“‘O, Mother, Mother, fare you well,  
Your wicked Polly’s doomed to Hell.  
The flaming wrath begins to roll,  
I am a lost and ruined soul.’

“She gnawed her tongue before she died,  
She rolled, she groaned, she screamed, she cried,  
‘O must I burn forevermore  
Till ten thousand thousand years are o’er?’

“It almost broke her mother’s heart  
To see her child to Hell depart.  
‘O is my daughter gone to Hell?  
My grief so great no tongue can tell.’

“She wrung her hands and groaned and cried  
And gnawed her tongue before she died;  
Her nails turned black, her voice did fail,  
She died and left this lower vale.”

Aunt Florence looked directly at the children in the back of the church, and finished the song on borrowed breath:

“Young people, lest this be your case,  
O turn to God and trust his grace.  
Down on your knees for mercy cry,  
Lest you in sin like Polly die.”

As a small boy snickered and Aunt Florence shambled back to her seat, Preacher Cherry opened the Bible and read:

“He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments and took a towel, and girded Himself.

“After that, He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded.

"Now, brothers and sisters," said Brother Cherry, "all of us Baptists understand what them words mean. The Word says that we oughta wash each other's feet because the Lord done washed the feet of them twelve dee-siples who was jest common folks like us. When Baptists footwash, it's to show they's humble to the Lord an humble to each other. Now, we's glad to have other kinds of Christians with us today, but we asks that they jest keep on their shoes. Tain't fitten fer Baptists to wash the feet of them that don't believe in footwashin."

Brother Cherry sat down. There was a general stir as a deacon posted himself by each row of benches, basin and towel in hand. The person at the end of the row then knelt before the person sitting next to him, unlaced his right shoe, took off his sock, and dabbed the wet towel a few times across the extended foot. Then the pan and towel passed to the next person on the row who performed the rite for whoever sat by him and so on, until the floor was damp with little puddles of water dripping down from the towel. A woman might remove a man's sock if she washed his feet, but she took off her own stocking when her turn came. But, if a woman washed the foot of a woman, she might remove her sister's stocking.

Sister Cherry, the preacher's wife, unlaced Juanita's oxford and slipped off the girl's pink anklet. Quickly Sister Cherry placed the slim little foot in the water and as quickly washed it. Juanita then knelt down before her mother, sitting on the other side.

The girl slipped her hand under her mother's skirt and untied a string which held up Mrs. Haley's stocking. Self-conscious because a brother sitting next to Mrs. Haley was watching sheepishly, Juanita accidentally dropped the home-made garter in the basin. This upset Mrs. Haley, who thrust her large foot into the water. The splash sounded through

the church and wet the child's face and the waist of her white print dress.

Juanita dropped the towel, her hands trembling. Mrs. Haley, her face red and angry, bent down and picked up the towel, throwing it across the shoulder of the disgraced girl. Tears were rolling down the child's cheeks as she finished drying her mother's feet. Never once did she raise her eyes to look at Mrs. Haley's face. I pulled a red hair ribbon out of my purse and tapped Mrs. Haley on the shoulder. "Tie your stocking with this," I said. Clara Haley smiled and I felt a real Baptist glow of virtue.

Maybe Sister Haley had not permitted Juanita to sit with the other young people because of their irreverence. After taking the basin, one boy unlaced the tennis shoe of his chum and tickled the sole of his bare foot. The other boy let out a guffaw, causing all the young folks to giggle. Elder Buster Skinner's face was like that of a Tennessee sheriff as he approached the two culprits.

"Git out!" he ordered. "Git out quick. Yore names is gone to be dropped from the church rolls an yore daddies is gone to skin you alive."

Basins traveled from hand to hand till the limp, shabby towels testified that every saint had followed the Gospel example of washing his brother's feet. Somebody began a quiet hymn which others took up until the whole congregation was singing:

"Sweet rivers of redeeming love lie just before mine eye,  
A few more days or years at most my trouble will be o'er,  
Had I the pinions of a dove, I'd to those rivers fly,  
I hope to join the heavenly host on Canaan's happy shore."

Basins and towels disappeared, the hymn was finished, and the preacher delivered an invocation. Brothers and sisters rose to their feet and filed through the wide-open doors.

Footwashing at Little Hurricane is always followed by dinner on the grounds. Big baskets were unloaded from the cars and wagons and the food spread out under the maples. When we sat down to eat with our hosts, we did not mention that next Sunday we would be breaking bread with the Two-Seed or Snake Baptists over at Caney Fork. That would have spoiled the day for the Duck Baptists at Little Hurricane.

## CHAPTER XIII

### DINNER ON THE GROUNDS

Uncle Billy Robinson wiped the sweat from his whiskers and wound up a long sermon. "Well, brothers an sisters, I think we done had enough of the Word fer this mornin. We better stop an eat what the sisters done fixed up in their baskets. But it's fitten that we partake of the Lord's food with a good Christian hymn. Let's sing number six, 'Come and Dine.' Lead us, Brother Harold."

My husband, a little flustered by the honor, stood up and led off the old mountain tune:

"Jesus has a table spread  
Where the saints of God are fed.  
With his manna He doth feed  
And supplies our every need;  
He invites his chosen people,  
    'Come and dine.'  
  
"O, tis sweet to sup with Jesus all the time.  
" 'Come and dine,' the Master calleth,  
    'Come and dine.'  
You may feast at Jesus' table all the time.  
He who fed the multitude,  
Turned the water into wine,  
To the hungry calleth now,  
    'Come and dine.' "

Before the last note there was a stirring and rustling of feet in the Caney Fork Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit Predestinarian Church. The children were the first to bound through the open door and down the three rickety steps to the dry, burnt grass. Then the menfolk carried out the hand-woven baskets which had been stacked behind the back benches.

"Now be careful of that lemon mee-rang pie in there," Cora Mayes called to her man, Ed. "Tote it easy er you'll git it all mixed up with that tater sallet. I wouldn't offer messed-up cookin to one of them Free-Will Baptists.

"That's right, Cousin Cora," agreed Brother Tom Burgess. "Didn't our ol grandaddy used to say real Baptist cookin makes real Baptist eatin? But messed-up cookin ain't no more fitten fer the mouth than them messed-up Free-Will doctrines is fitten fer the soul."

The women spread out tablecloths in the oak grove and unpacked the food while the men cut branches from the trees and swished away the flies. A peal of thunder rolled down the encircling mountains to stir the slumbering, dusty heat caught tight in this August-baked valley of Caney Fork.

"Hear that thunder." Uncle Billy pointed a finger to Heaven. "That means a blessin's a-comin." He sat down on a log and watched his wife open a jar of pickles flavored with cloves and nutmeg.

"I hope it'll be gallons of blessin," drawled Brother Bob Rogers. "My patch is drier'n a baked turnip. My beans jest crumbed up an blowed away like fodder dust when I started to pick em. Squash an okry's mighty nigh burned an termaters made nothin but nubbins no bigger'n my thumb."

"Put that chicken dressin in the middle where ever'body can git some," Sister Eva Fay Langham said to Miss Miriam. "My, but you're a purty sight fer a bride," she added to the eighteen-year-old girl. "An so much ejunction too. Why didn't you bring that husband of yorn along?"

"Oh, he got the hay fever from that ragweed we haven't had time to cut," Miss Miriam answered. "Mother, what shall I slice these tomatoes and cucumbers in?"

"Put em in the paper plates Daddy brought," replied Sister Blair, the Seventh Day Adventist nurse who tended the Two-Seeders in Caney Fork for everything from cut toes to cancer of the stomach.



"I reckon you might cut them chocolate layer cakes now, Miss Celia, fore you set them out," Sister Mary Ann White said. "Them is mighty fine-lookin sanwiches," she added, nodding her head approvingly as she looked in the shoe box of food we had brought.

"You all have traveled a lot," said Deacon Clarence White, her husband. "Do folks up North have dinner on the grounds like us? There's them what says Yankee Baptists is so high-toned they calls supper dinner an then eats it with leven different forks."

"Now you stop pesterin Miss Celia with them questions," Mary Ann told him sharply; then turning to me, "Honey, there ain't much to eat in Caney Fork, but you an yore man is mighty welcome to our pore diet."

"That's an awful fine spread for my tooth," I answered, my mouth watering when I saw the heaps of fried chicken.

"Come Tuesday," said Brother Hollins to Brother Burgess, as they carried the cooler of lemonade out of the Seventh Day Adventist car, "my sow an her eight suckin pigs'll be gone two months. But I ain't goin out a-huntin them like that man in the Good Book who had ninety-nine sheep bedded down in his pasture an went traipsin around over the mountains a-lookin fer the one that was gone. I ain't a-knowin much bout the ways of sheep. But the Lord done pree-destined hogs to do what they oughta do. I ain't never seen one that didn't show up when they was sposed to at hog-killin time."

"The Lord'll send em all home, come fall," Brother Burgess laughed. "He takes care of His own an He's a-knowin good Baptists'll be a-needin meat fer winter."

"Dinner's ready, folks," Sister Cora announced. "Uncle Billy, give us the blessin."

The old man rose to his full six feet, lifted his bushy grey eyebrows and cast his eyes toward the heavy, bulging clouds. "Oh, Lord," he prayed, "thank you fer yore goodness to us pore sinners. Thank you, Lord, fer them fine, yaller-legged

chickens that the sisters done fried up so nice. We're mindful too, oh Lord, of yore kindness fer givin us that fine tater sallet an that smacky home-cured ham. Lord, bless us with good crops an fat chickens an hogs fer our winter keep. Ef it be thy will, Lord, send us rain. We don't want no gulley-wash like you sent in Noah's time to drown out them sinners a-cussin an a-scoffin, but jest nough to make winter cabbage an to fill up the springs so our cows won't be a-thirstin. In yore name we ask all this. Amen."

Boys who had been teetering on bare feet now reached for the fried chicken. Tim Burgess boxed his son, Howard, on the ear when he saw the boy piling food into his cap. "Git yoreself a plate er git yoreself to the pig pen," Tim roared.

Cora grabbed her nephew, Ed Junior, by the shirt when she caught him making toward the woods with a whole pie. "Not that you boys shouldn't enjoy yoreselves," she said, "but it'd be awful nice to leave a couple of pieces fer the grown folks too."

"Oughta make em wait fer second table," grumbled Bob Rogers. "When I was a young-un, grown folks always et first an we et the leavins."

"Yes, an you got in more mischief than a bunch of Methodists tryin to git to Heaven by sprinklin," retorted Sister Cora. "Don't tell me. I ain't fergot when you an Tom Burgess slipped a dead toad frog in the poke sallet cause you was mad at waitin."

I reached a fork into a jar of pickles. "That's right, young lady," laughed Deacon White. "Dip down in that jar an fish up a good Baptist pickle, immersed in good Baptist vinegar."

"Twould be a powerful help if folks would fit in a jar for immersion," I retorted.

"Bless you, Honey," said Uncle Billy, "I been a-thinkin the same thing. Joe Walker an his boys is six foot high an weighs two hunnerd pounds apiece. They got saved way last March an we been waitin fer it to rain so's they could git

immersed. But they ain't a drop of rain in them creeks. They's all as dry as Tennessee terbacker leaves in September. An the Lord knows it ain't scriptural baptism to sprinkle a cup of water on the head of a saved sinner."

"A sinner's gotta have rain to make him grow in grace, jest like my corn's gotta have it to grow roastin ears," Bob Rogers joined in. "I tole my wife las time I went out in the field that Eve woman shore had us all livin by the sweat of our brow, jest like the Lord tole her we would when she et that ol apple back there in Eden."

Uncle Billy laughed so hard he coughed out a chunk of pickle. The boys stopped gnawing chicken bones, and the whole crowd joined in. Finally the old man caught his breath enough to speak.

"Brother Bob sayin that to his wife made me think of the way my pore ol Dad used to talk to my blessed mother. Now Dad'd come in out of the garden hot an sweaty. An there'd be Mother bendin over the stove, jest as hot an sweaty but singin songs to glory. Nacherally Dad'd start grumblin, 'Ef it wasn't fer that Eve woman, we'd done have our livin without breakin our backs fer it.'

"Mother'd stop singin an raise up her head from that hot cook stove, but she'd never complain. No sir! That fine Baptist soul never complained. 'Don't be throwin off on a good woman what got in trouble,' she'd say. 'She ain't the first pore female who got the wrong seed planted in her by some ol devil of a snake.'

"Friends," said Uncle Billy, shaking his head up and down, "we know from the Word that the Lord done made up humans like Hissself an He meant fer em to live good. The very first one of His makin was Adam. He made that man out of good, hard clay an He set him on a board to dry. Then the Lord, He took a good look at that Adam critter an said, 'First-rate.' An, when Adam got dry, He done breathed in him the breath of life.

"Then the Lord give him a fine house with a big yard right in the Garden of Eden. Ever evenin, when he got through plowin out the oceans so the rain'd fill em up, He'd come an talk with Adam fore He went up high to see if them angels'd been doin their chores. Lots of times He'd find Adam eatin apples, so He said, 'Go ahead, Adam, an eat all the apples you want ceptin them in the middle of the orchard. Them's my winter apples I'm a-savin fer my angels.'

"Well, now, Adam was set up right fine, but he got powerful lonesome. He was a-wantin fer a mate. The Lord knowin this put him to sleep one day, gouged a rib out of his side an made Eve. Fore He breathed the breath of life into her, He put somethin of His own self in her so she'd allus make Adam a good wife. Then, when He give her life, He give her the same talkin-to bout them apples that He give Adam.

"Adam tried to be a good man to her, but she was always a-foolin round them middle trees when she oughta been doin her bakin an fryin. One day, when the Lord was off a-finishin up some mountains, the Devil come crawlin round one of them middle trees close to Eve. He was dressed up in a snake skin, shiny like velvet, an was so purty Eve reached down an picks him up. Then he curls round her an unbeknownst planted the wicked seed in her.

"'Why don't you help yoreself to some of these fine apples?' he asks her real soft-like.

"'Oh, they's the Lord's apples, an He's a-savin em up fer winter,' she answers.

"'I tell you they's the finest eatin apples of the lot, an the Lord'll never miss jest one,' he says. 'Here, I'll shin up that tree an git you one myself.'

"So Eve, she took the apple, an the Devil went on his way. Then she went home an give Adam a bite too. Twas the finest-tastin apple Adam'd ever bit on. Fore sundown them two'd plumb stripped them middle trees.

"Then the Lord come back an missed them winter apples. So He calls out, mad as can be, 'Adam! You Adam!'

"Adam answered, 'Here, Lord.'

"An the Lord said, 'Who stole them winter apples?'

" 'Don't know, Lord,' Adam answered back scared. 'Eve, I spect.'

"Then the Lord calls, 'Eve! Eve!' But Eve was a-lyin low, so He calls again, 'Eve! Eve!'

"Then Eve squeaked out, 'Here, Lord.'

"An the Lord said, 'Eve, who stole them winter apples?'

" 'Don't know, Lord,' she answers. 'Adam, I spect.'

"That made the Lord so riled He picks em both up an throws em over the fence. Then He looks cross the fence at em an says what the Good Book tells us, 'Cursed is the ground fer thy sake. In toil shalt thou eat of it fer all the days of thy life. Thorns an thistles shall it bring forth to thee; an thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread till thou return unto the ground, fer out of it wast thou taken. For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.' "

"Amen," said Brother Bob Rogers.

"But that wasn't the worst of it," said Uncle Billy. "Very first young-un them two had was Cain, an he come from the seed the Devil'd planted in his mammy. Next one was Abel, an he sprouted up from the seed of the Lord. An Cain killed Abel, cause that bad seed pree-destined him to do it.

"An that's the way it's been ever since. There's some what's born with the seed of the Lord in em. They begets the good ones that's pree-destined to be saved. There's them what's got the seed of the Devil. Them begets the bad-uns that's pree-destined to be lost. The weed's pree-destined to beget weeds an the corn's pree-destined to beget corn. Tain't in our power to change the Lord's plantin."

The thunder crackled like kindling wood and lightning

zigzagged over the mountains. Brothers and sisters gathered the dishes of left-over food as big drops fell on the thirsty ground.

"Wait a minute, folks," Uncle Billy said. "Let's thank the Lord fer His blessin fore we go in."

The old man spread out his long arms like the protecting wings of a Baptist angel. "Thank you, Lord, fer this rain fallin on the jest who'll be saved an the unjest who'll be lost. Thank you fer freshenin our gardens. Send us enough to fill up the creeks fer good baptizins. Lord, we mean to abide in yore heart that's kind an big enough fer ever'body in the whole world. Amen!"

## CHAPTER XIV

### HERESY AT HORSE CAVE

"That there ol Campbellite tryin to git you to jine up? If you don't mind an ol woman puttin in her jaw, stay away from them folks." Aunt Tut hobbled over to our cabin as the Church of Christ preacher left. He had just taken our subscription to the *Progressive Farmer* at a cost of one dollar for five years, with a wall map of the United States thrown in as a premium.

"Why, what's the matter with em, Aunt Tut?" Harold wanted to know.

"Son, there's plenty an a lot more. The Word done say that the love of money is the root of all evil. Them folks claim to foller the Word, kiver to kiver, Jonah to John. But they's so stingy with their Maker they won't have organ or fiddle in their church houses. If they ever git to Heaven, they'll start bawlin out the Lord, claimin them harps He'll hand the saints ain't scripshural cause He used up good gold makin em stead of dollars.

"But they ain't gone to git to Heaven to give the Lord none of their lip," Aunt Tut said grimly. "They'll all go to Hell, a-squeezin fistfuls of pennies they done hid in their buryin clo'es an a-swearin the Lord ain't a-foller'n the Word. Didn't I heerd that ol skin-a-rock, make-a-dollar Zeb Whiting, what was jest here a-takin yore money, preach that they was the only ones a-goin to Heaven cause," Aunt Tut wound up with sarcasm and disgust, "they's the only true church."

"The only true church!" Harold whistled. "Whew! That lets us all out, Aunt Tut."

"Shore does, son," Aunt Tut chuckled. "But, ef I was you folks, I'd worry more bout gittin them termaters canned up.

I seen the geese a-flyin over when I was a-feedin my chickens. That means winter's on the way."

I changed the subject. "But weren't the Church of Christ folks all Baptists a hundred years back?"

Aunt Tut turned her honest old face to mine. "Celia girl, I can't rightly say what they was that fer back, but I kin sure tell you they ain't much to build on today. Look at the way they's a-scandalizin the Word over yander at Horse Cave. Can't git together with each other on whether the Word says to take communion out of the same cup or fer ever'body to have a cup for hisself to drink by hisself. One-cuppers is too tight to put out a few extry nickels to buy cups to go round. Many-cuppers is fraid they might give the measles free to some other brother."

For the next few days Harold and I drove around the near-by community of Horse Cave listening to both sides of the question. "Harold, this is the dullest sect in all Christendom," I said after we had visited the first half-dozen members of the Lord's only true church at Horse Cave. "I'll be mighty sorry for all the saints who are expecting to whoop it up in Heaven when Miss Ottie and Elder Wilson get up there."

"Personally," Harold answered, "I'll take my chances on Brother Dee's brand of salvation. His folks don't think it a sin to pat a foot to a fiddle or a guitar so long as it's a sanctified patting. I remember when Henry Lawson, the best square-dance fiddler on Bull Creek, joined the Church of Christ. He broke his fiddle square in two, laid it on the altar, and wouldn't ever scrape out another note. The same thing's happened in the Tennessee hills that's happened in the Texas hills. In one community after the other the Church of Christ has damned out and stamped out folk the culture."

Harold grew up in the highly respected progressive Campbellite denomination known as the Disciples of Christ, parent body of these non-progressive Campbellites, self-righteously calling themselves the Church of Christ. Alexander Campbell,



founder of the original Campbellite movement back in the 1830's, was a dissident Baptist preacher who hoped to unite all believers under the common name of Christian. He wound up, like many another apostle of unity before him, as the ancestor of a dozen new sects.

The Church of Christ broke away from the Disciples back in the late 90's. Its leaders swore that the use of musical instruments in services "ministered to pride and worldliness, was without the sanction of New Testament precept and example and was consequently unscriptural and sinful." To-day the Church of Christ is spread widely, with the majority of its 300,000 members in the South and West, and is divided over a question that may rock the foundations of the denomination—the cup question.

Preacher Clark wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and smacked his lips. "Elder Wilson, that was a mighty fine supper." Then he cut a plug of Granger with his jack-knife and tossed it into his mouth. As his yellow teeth bit into the tobacco, he beamed on the Elder's wife. "Nothin in this whole world can set off fried chicken an huckleberry pie of Sister Nannie Bess's makin like a plug of juicy Granger Rough Cut. If the suppers I et this week is a sample," he chuckled, shaking his better than two hundred pounds, "why, I'd say Horse Cave is gone to do a powerful work fer the Lord in lookin out fer its new preacher."

Elder Perry Wilson's girls by his divorced wife giggled and Junior, the youngest boy, winked at his older brother Bobbie. Elder Wilson got up in a huff. "Nannie Bess, you take Breacher Clark to meetin. I'll be a mite late. Got to go across the creek an jump Brother James bout that mortgage he done missed up a payment on."

"All right, girls, clear them dishes away," Nannie Bess called to her stepdaughters.

"Coast is clear!" Bobbie yelled to Junior, and the two

snapped their slingshots at the leftovers on the supper plates.

"You young-uns pipe down," shouted Nannie Bess. "Git on out of the house with that there racket. Brother Clark, would you mind stoppin down the road a piece fer Miss Ottie?"

Brother Clark replied, "The more as brings theirselves to do Christian worship, the greater is our day of glory. Let's bring all God's children to the only true church."

Nannie Bess pinned on her imitation white Panama with a chain of daisies around the crown, Preacher Clark took her arm, and they stepped into his old Chevrolet.

Although it was half an hour to meeting time, the aisles were filled when Brother Clark walked in with Sister Nannie Bess and Miss Ottie. Horse Cave knew how to welcome its new preacher on this first Sunday of his ministry. He shook hands with everyone, although this was the third service that day. As he mounted the platform, the boards creaked under his great weight. He began abruptly.

"Brothers an sisters, I been a-studyin somethin ever since I went to the postoffice to git my mail yesterday. After I stood in line with all them denominational people who don't belong to the true church, the only church, our Church of Christ, I went home an starts readin the Word. I was a-hopin to find somethin to show all them Baptists, Methodists an other kinds of denominational folks.

"So I thought to read the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. You see, an epistle is a letter too. When I gits a letter from my boy, Hughie, who's fightin over in Africa, that's an epistle.

"Well, tonight, brothers an sisters, we're gone to talk about that special delivery Paul done writ to the Church at Corinth. Paul says that he's writin that there epistle 'unto the church of God which is at Corinth.' Course anybody who knows anything bout the Word knows good an well that means our

Church of Christ. Can't none of them denominational folks read that mail cause it was fer us at Corinth.

"When that there postmaster at Corinth was puttin up the mail, he didn't go a-puttin it in the wrong pigeonhole cause he was a-mindin his boss. An he wasn't collectin the wages of sin, what is death. No sirree! His boss was the Lord, an that postmaster was mindin his business. Brothers an sisters"—Preacher Clark waved his arms—"that postmaster in Corinth put that letter where it belonged in pigeonhole C.

"Now jest fancy them different preachers of today traipsin to the postoffice at Corinth fer their mail. First, they'd come up a Baptist parson, one of them ol Hardshellers, an ask fer Baptist mail. Nacherally, the postmaster looks in pigeonhole B. He'd never in his life think of givin him the letter Paul wrote to the Church of Christ. No mail fer the Baptist Church.

"Second, there stands the ol Methodist rev'rend. Course the postmaster looks in pigeonhole M. No mail fer the Methodist Church.

"Next comes the Christian Church pastor, them what calls theirselves the Disciples an what broke away from us cause they was a-lustin fer organ music agin the spressed word of the Scripture. An that Christian Science practitioner an that Congregationalist dressed up fit to kill. That ol faithful postmaster at Corinth fingers over the letter in pigeonhole C, but that there letter ain't fer none of them. That means the Lord ain't sent them no mail.

"Now comes the time fer the preacher from the Church of Christ. He'd been standin aside politely waitin. He knowed all along that that there letter wrote to the Church of Christ wouldn't go to none of them other church representatives. Then he steps up to the winder an asks, 'Is there any mail fer the Church of Christ?'

"Right away that postmaster give him the letter wrote by

Paul which he absolutely refused all them other preachers.

"Years after that the Church of Christ preachers began tellin the other churches got up by men, 'You're readin our mail, cause that letter was wrote to us.' No wonder that post-master refused to give that letter to them churches or to them diff'rent branches of the denomination callin itself the Church of God.

"Now, ever time them denominational folks open up that Book an read one of Paul's epistles, they're a-readin somebody else's mail. Them letters was spressly sent to us, the Church of Christ.

"Ef them folk'd learn somethin by it, they'd make this man of God mighty happy. But they's a-readin mail sent to somebody else. I say to you, brothers an sisters, tell them Baptists an Methodists to come an be adopted into the family of the Lord which is the only church, the true church, the Church of Christ. Then they'll be a-readin their own mail."

Big tears rolled down Preacher Clark's jowls and over his double chin. "Now, brothers an sisters, this little church without them worldly trimmins, tucked away here in Horse Cave, is a-yearnin to receive them unsaved Christians. Bring em down here," he begged. "That's what I'm here fer. We'll work on em till they see the clear, shinin light an come with us to drink the true communion. Course," he added hastily, "they can't drink with us till they git to be true Christians.

"Let's turn to number one-nineteen—one-nineteen in the hymn book, an sing the communion song. Give us the pitch on yore tunin fork, Brother Stebbins."

Brother Stebbins stepped to the platform and addressed the brethren. "Some of them progressives in the Christian Church is always tryin to throw off on us non-progressives in the Church of Christ by sayin the tunin fork is an instrument jest like an organ. Do you know what I tells em? I tells em that this here tunin fork has sense enough to know when to quit. It's always hushed up an in my pocket fore singin

starts. An that's more'n you can say fer one of them sweet-talkin organs, full of the Devil's honey."

Brother Stebbins blew the pitch. The congregation took up the communion hymn and the deacons came forward to serve.

Elder Bradshaw, ninety-one, took a bottle of Golden Glow grape juice from a shelf on the wall. With a shaky hand he poured the juice into the tall, hexagonal-shaped, nickel-plated communion cup. He squinted his dull eyes, saw that the cup was half full, and passed it to Brother Clark. The preacher took a long draft and raised his head. A dribble of purple juice ran down the corner of his mouth and a streak of tobacco juice ran down the communion cup.

Elder Oliver received the cup, drew a noisy sip, rolled it around his mouth with his tongue, and lapped up the dribble, smacking his whitened, toothless gums. Then the cup, passed back and forth by the deacons, traveled from aisle to aisle, from Christian lip to Christian lip, until it reached Sister Nannie Bess. She took it from the hands of Deacon Belden and held it for a long minute looking at the tobacco stains on its sides.

Deliberately she reached into the pocket of her dress and pulled out a small tin folding cup. She tipped the communion cup, daintily poured a bit of the juice into the tin container, and passed the larger vessel on to Miss Ottie.

"Why, Sister Nannie Bess!" Miss Ottie gasped. The mouths of the congregation sprang open and every eye turned toward the wife of Elder Wilson.

Elder Oliver was the first to catch his breath. "Ain't none of them sisters gone to dee-file Christian communion in open dee-fiance of the Word," he bawled.

Sister Nannie Bess answered him with a piercing look, "I ain't dee-filin my mouth with yore pyorrhea, Brother Oliver, an I ain't gone to stain what teeth I got left with Brother Clark's terbacker juice."

"Don't the Word say we's all one body?" Deacon Belden barked. "An, ef we's all got the same heart fer the Lord, we's all got the same mouth fer the Lord."

"But whoever heard of the Lord puttin terbacker in his mouth?" retorted Sister Nannie Bess. "Can't see why the church treasury don't buy separate communion cups fer ever member."

"The church treasury'd melt faster'n butter in a grease pan ef we let some triffin folks I know mess round with it," Miss Ottie spat out.

"Not throwin off on nobody, there's some what's still got the first dollar they ever made by sendin their pa to the asylum an their ma to the pore farm," Sister Nannie Bess shot back.

"There's them so righteous they'd bury the whole congregation, ef it didn't take a coffin, fore they'd squeeze out a nickelf fer separate cups," Sister Birdie Sue Hargis wheezed out, her ample bosom shaking with anger.

Preacher Clark pounded the pulpit. "Sister Birdie Sue! Sister Nannie Bess! Sister Ottie!" he commanded. "You all stop that jawin. The Word done told us that a woman ain't got no say in the Church of Christ."

By that time every brother and sister was standing. "One cup!" some of them shouted. "Many cups!" came from others.

Voices were stormy and words threatening when Elder Wilson walked in, followed by Brother James, who was saying meekly, "I'll be right on the spot with the ten dollars next crop time."

Elder Wilson stopped just long enough to take in the scene. Then he shouldered his way up the aisle to the platform, contemptuously ordered Preacher Clark to "move out of the way" and faced the crowd.

"Brothers! Sisters! What kind of Christian worship is this? The Scripture says everythin's to be done decent-like an in order."

"Don't you start spoutin Scripture at us, you ol money-

hog," screamed Sister Eunice Guest from Gowen's Holler. "Don't the Scripture say an elder ain't supposed to have more'n one wife. An ain't you got two livin women a-carryin yore name?"

"Brother James, turn off the lights," shouted Elder Wilson, ignoring her. Brother James jumped up and threw off the switch just as Deacon Belden made a wild lunge toward him.

Caught in the dark, the brothers and sisters scuttled out of the Horse Cave Church of Christ. "One cup!" they shouted into the darkness. "Many cups!"

The next day, before the sun had touched Dead Man's Peak, the roads were astir with one-cuppers moving toward Miss Ottie's and many-cuppers bound the other way for Elder Wilson's house. Buzz Harder and Brother James, driving toward Elder Wilson's, overtook Sister Birdie Sue, waddling down the road.

"Whoa there, Charlie. Whoa, Mollie," Buzz Harder called to his team. "Git on in, sister, an ride with us." The springs shook and the wagon sagged as Sister Birdie Sue climbed up.

"I'm jest plumb ashamed of the way them one-cuppers been actin up," she exploded. "Elder Wilson a-doin all that good work fer the church like settin in new glass winders, an them one-cuppers behavin like that to his pore little wife. Tain't Christian."

As they reached the Elder's house, he came out on the porch. "Git out of that peach tree or I'll skin you alive!" he called to his two boys and then walked to the white picket gate. "Come right in, friends. A lot of folks is already here. We aim to settle this here cup business wunst an fer all."

"Yes sir," squeaked Brother James.

"Wunst an fer all," echoed Buzz Harder.

Elder Wilson frowned as he addressed the brothers and sisters sitting in his parlor. "I ain't never thought much about this cup business fore that ruckus last night. One cup or many

cups ain't made no difference to me. But I likes to humor my wife ef it don't cost too much an ef it ain't agin the Word. Last night when we got home Nannie Bess kep rilin bout many cups so I starts figgerin out how much separate cups'd set us back. Don't mount to much a-tall. We can get em fer nine an a third cents apiece ef we order em out of the Sears, Roebuck catalogue.

"Then I goes to the parlor an takes down the Good Book. All night long I hunted through it a-tryin to git some light on this cup business. Didn't get me a wink of sleep. And did I find anything agin separate cups? No sir, folks, nary a word. Nary a word."

The brothers and sisters nodded assent. "The good Lord knows I ain't no Scrip-to-rian," Sister Nannie Bess remarked. "But it don't make sense to mix that communion juice with terbacker juice."

"Anybody'd tell you a mess like that ain't fit fer the stomach," commented Sister Birdie Sue. "But Ottie Neal'd pizen you to sell that there Cates Medicine fer rheumatism, arthritis, neuritis, neuralgia, lumbago, chills, fever an itchin piles. Specially that Dr. Cates done put them advertisements in our Church of Christ paper, the *Firm Foundation*. Makes no difference what's safe fer the stummik so long's the dollar's safe in Miss Ottie's pocket."

Miss Ottie was finishing her breakfast of weak tea and thin toast when the one-cuppers traipsed through her open door. "I declare I ain't never been so frazzled as I was last night," said Sister Eunice, pulling out a chair. "Them Wilsons act like they can jest boss all Horse Cave an own all of middle Tennessee. I'm gittin plumb tired about it."

"Sisters an brothers," croaked Elder Bradshaw, a veteran of sixty years' feuding in Horse Cave, "we come here to talk out this cup business an not shoot off our mouths gossipin. The Church of Christ speaks where the Bible speaks,



an it's silent where the Bible's silent. That's what we've always told them denominational people. The Bible always talks bout the cup an not the cups. That's plumb enough fer us. We ain't a-gittin fancy like them Progressives in the Christian Church who's too high an mighty to drink after each other."

"Pears like we oughta put the whole thing to a vote an let the majority rule," Sister Cora ventured timidly.

Elder Oliver stared her into a corner an answered sternly, "Sister Lane, that's one of them ideas you git from bein married to one of them votin Baptists. It'd be better fer them what oughtn't to talk up to shet up. The New Testament don't nowhere recognize majority rule an anybody who's responsible fer practicin it in the Church of Christ, be he elder, deacon, or jest plain member, he'll have to answer to the Lord fer his misconduct.

"No sir, the Church of Christ is supposed to be run by the elders who's appointed by the Lord. An all us elders but Perry Wilson done made up our minds we'll keep drinkin out of that same vessel which is done been blessed by the elders. Come Sunday, us elders'll lay down the law. That'll settle this cup business wunst an fer all."

"Amen! Wunst an fer all," croaked Elder Bradshaw.

The following Sunday morning Miss Ottie was the first to arrive on the church grounds. Sister Birdie Sue came along five minutes later and planted herself on the opposite side of the weedy acre. Lips drawn, they glared at each other but neither spoke a word. Other brothers and sisters arrived, the one-cuppers ranging themselves beside Miss Ottie, the many-cuppers beside Sister Birdie Sue.

Preacher Clark rattled up in his Chevrolet and walked between the two factions. He squeezed a smile at Miss Ottie's group on the right. When he turned a conciliating look toward Sister Birdie's group, he got a collective glare that made

him hang his head and retreat lumberingly toward the church door.

Elder Wilson brought Nannie Bess in his big maroon-colored Buick. He got out, took his wife by the arm, and shook hands with the many-cuppers.

When Preacher Clark unlocked the door, the brothers and sisters stampeded into the church, the many-cuppers seating themselves on the right, the one-cuppers on the left. Preacher Clark mounted the platform and presented an uneasy face to his parishioners.

"Brothers an sisters," he began, "there's been a whole lot of talk goin on in Horse Cave, but ol friends ain't even been a-talkin to each other. Now, ef we're gone to talk a-tall, we oughta talk when the Scripture talks, an that's all the talkin we'll do.

"Now I reckon the best way to settle a church fuss is to see what the Word says. I'm a-openin the Book at the Second Epistle of John. An what does John say? 'Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ hath not God.'

"Now the Greeks had a word, *pro-ago*." Brother Clark's jaw came down hard on the last syllable. "Us that talks English got words like progress an progressive from it. An progress means to go on jest like John says.

"Well, you can see fer yoreself, brothers an sisters, what the Word means. Ef you stop doin things the old-fashioned way an start bein new-fangled an progressive, you'll wind up in Hell, sure as this little church at Horse Cave's gone to bust up ef we don't git back to the Word.

"Ever single one of you knows that the Church of Christ done busted wide open on account of instrumental music. It split cause a few fancy-minded folks got tired of good old-fashioned hymn-histin an started askin the Devil to find em something new."

Preacher Clark ended his message in a wheedling voice.

"There ain't no need of bustin wide open agin over this communion cup business, specially as this here is sech a purty one an the members give a right smart to buyin it."

The many-cuppers jumped to their feet, denouncing the preacher. "Come down out of that pulpit an I'll tear yore lyin tongue out," Sister Birdie Sue shouted. Deacon Belden hollered for the one-cuppers, "Ef you keep on like that, we'll not jest throw you out of the church; we'll throw you out on yore cussed heads."

Elder Wilson stalked down the aisle and shook his fist at Preacher Clark. "It don't say that John or them other disciples chewed terbacker."

Deacon Belden rushed forward and grabbed Elder Wilson by the shoulder. "Go on home an drink soapsuds out of yore new lectric wash tub ef you don't want to drink communion out of our cup." Elder Wilson shook him off and let his fist fly. Deacon Belden ducked the blow and lammed a fist into his enemy's middle.

Elder Wilson toppled, knocking over his wife, who had run up to stand by her man. Sister Nannie Bess reeled and fell back on Miss Ottie, the crown of her hat ripping open from contact with the old maid's sharp, flaying heels. Miss Ottie struggled up along with a mat of Nannie Bess's new false hair. Birdie Sue was hit in the chest by Miss Ottie's rake-like hand flying wild in the air, and in retaliation she ripped the skirt off Miss Ottie's only Sunday dress.

"Yes sirree! Terbacker juice or no terbacker juice, one communion cup was good enough fer my Lord an one common cup is good enough fer me," yelled Brother Ted Grover as he swung at Buzz Harder. His fist missed Buzz but landed hard on venerable Elder Bradshaw's midriff.

Benches were upturned, song books flew through the air, window glass cracked and shattered as the members of the only true church settled this communion question. Preacher Clark stepped from the platform and pulled up Elder Brad-

shaw, putting a handkerchief to the elder's bleeding nose. Then he stormed at his congregation. "Them that wants to cuss fight better git out of this house of God, cause the rest of us Christians is gone to take communion ef we have to call in the sheriff to do it."

"Git the cup an juice," shouted Elder Oliver as he crawled from under an upturned bench, followed by Sister Birdie Sue, who pointed to her bulging bosom. He grabbed Nannie Bess by the collar and they scrambled toward the door.

One-cuppers and many-cuppers were still settling the communion question as Elder Wilson chugged along in his Buick with his wife and Sister Birdie Sue. Birdie Sue reached in her bosom. "Here tis," she chuckled, pulling out the communion cup. "I took it off the shelf an hid it when that low-down preacher was pickin up ol man Bradshaw. It'll make a mighty purty flower vase in yore parlor, Sister Nannie Bess."

## CHAPTER XV

### PROPHETS OF THE CROOKED CROSS

This prophetic message is addressed *not* to Judah, the Jews, but to the House of *Israel*. It is a message to give light to the lost Ten-Tribed House of *Israel*—in these last days!

—Prophet Herbert Armstrong,  
of the Radio Church of God.

I banged the door and ran into the kitchen. For the last three days we had opened our eyes in the morning to that radio prophet's thunder. At night when we finally shut our eyes it was to the same roaring thunder.

"Allie," I turned to my housekeeper and demanded impatiently, "what kind of people have moved into the little cabin?"

"Oh, Mis' Preece." She raised her head from the sink with that rapt expression on her face that I had learned to know so well. "The Dabneys are Lord-fearin folks. They come in from Mississippi two weeks ago. Him and her jest set there afore that radio with the Word in their hands all day long. The Lord willin, I'm a-hopin me an my man'll be able to do jest like that some day."

The wind was blowing up a squall out of doors, and the tiny cabin windows let in precious little light for our kind of work. But I consoled myself with the fact that the shut door and windows might keep out that continuous blast that had already created havoc for Harold and me.

Harold pushed open the heavy split-log back door with his foot and squeezed through with bulging armfuls of dry twigs. He dropped them beside our little barrel stove and said: "There's our kindling. Now, we'll have a good warm fire going in a minute."

Allie dried her hands on her floursack kitchen apron and started to build a fire. "I tell you, Mis' Preece," she announced, "them Dabneys is gone to be fine Christian neighbors. They foller that prophet word fer word from the Scripture an they give me this little book of hisn." She pulled up her apron and took from her dress pocket a little pamphlet. It was "The Program of the Antichrist," by the radio evangelist, Mordecai F. Ham of Louisville, Kentucky.

Harold stared at it with bulging eyes and asked Allie if he might have it for a couple of days to read.

"Now, you are welcome to it, Mr. Preece," she answered, "fer today an Saturday, but I'll be wantin it back Sunday as I'm aimin to study on it myself."

The old familiar sign came up, the set jaw and compressed lips, so I turned to Harold and said: "Now, don't you think we'd better go out and see if Mr. Charlie has come. It's just about time for him to make his run and I'm expecting a real important letter." But I didn't wait for his answer. I just took him by the hand and went out the front door. I had hardly closed it before he exploded, "Another one of those damned prophets of the Crooked Cross. A wave of the swastika and you can expect Allie to get caught on one of its hooks," he growled.

"Now, look here, Brother Hon," I snapped back at him. "Do you expect to live in the world surrounded by Uncle Billies, Aunt Tuts and Brother Dees all your life? Of course, these prophets of hate are going to reap their share of converts."

Before I could really expound, I heard a voice behind me saying: "Now, yes, you will, Joel. You gone to take that job acrost the tracks like they done asked you to an hep em with the chimney. Now, I can't send off fer that book from Brother Armstrong lessen I got some money to send him."

I turned my head and right behind us were our new neighbors, Brother and Sister Dabney, whose little mailbox

had been placed next to ours. She took a couple of quick steps forward and came up along side of us.

"We're mighty glad to have you as our neighbors," I said, stopping until Mr. Dabney caught up with us.

"Yessum, we're proud to know you all," Mrs. Dabney said shaking hands with us. "And this is Mr. Dabney, my husband."

Before Mr. Dabney had finished telling me about the loss of both his and her inherited farms because of missing up on their taxes, Mr. Charlie, the postman, had arrived.

He began to unload the huge bundle that he had tied up with a little cord for us, most of it small-sect literature.

"There you are, Mrs. Preece," he said, handing me an envelope with five dollars' worth of stamps. "I reckon that will take care of you for a while." He handed Mr. Dabney a bundle full of tracts and pamphlets that almost equaled in size the one that he had given Harold. Then Mr. Charlie was on his way.

Mrs. Dabney, without any formalities or apologies, began to finger the bundle in Harold's hands.

"Why, Brother Preece," she said, "bless my soul if you ain't one of us. We get *Dawn*, too. An looka there, Joel, there's Brother Hodges' *The Prophetic Times* and Brother Armstrong's *The Plain Truth* . . ."

Brother Dabney threw his arms around Harold and said: "Brother Preece, I was awful sad when we had to leave Mississippi an the sheriff took over our homestead an acres. But I knowed all the time that the Lord was gone to take keer of Joel Dabney an his woman. Now, it's jest like He done planned it. He done put His Chosen People, the sure-nuff Israelites—the English an the Americans—right next to each other so as they can spread the truth of His prophecy."

Of course, they had no notion that I was a pretender to that same title. They did not know or recognize that I was Jewish. But it was clear that Brother and Sister Dabney were

ready to forget whatever trouble had overtaken them in Mississippi when fortune had brought them so close to Harold.

"Is that little one yore only one left at home?" Mrs. Dabney asked me as we retraced our steps back to the cabins.

"The only one abroad and at home," I replied.

"My, my," She shook her head. "It's sinful fer an old woman to say so, but it don't feel right not to have a baby in the house. When I was yore age, Mis' Preece," she went on, "I couldn't hardly take a step lessen I was steppin over babies crawlin round—what with my eight girls an one boy." It was hard to believe that the slim woman with the iron-gray hair walking beside me was already sixty years old and the mother of nine children. One was dead and the others were all married.

When we came to our gate, Mr. Dabney and Harold were already deep in conversation. "Lord, Lord," I thought, "there goes another day's work." But, as they reached our gate, Harold suddenly stretched out his arm for a handshake and said: "Well, Brother Dabney, another work day. We write for a living and it's time that we get at it."

Brother Dabney looked bewildered. But he and Mrs. Dabney started trudging toward their cabin.

"Harold, did you speak to them about turning the radio down?" I asked.

"Look, Sister," he said turning on me fiercely, "you might as well try to separate a sot from his bottle as to separate the Dabneys from their blasting, blasted radio prophets."

"Very cheerful," I said. "Very, very cheerful," I repeated as I came into our work room.

I deposited the envelope with my stamps on the bookshelf and gathered my material for a day's work. No sooner had I settled down with paper, pencil, and a dogged determination than I heard a rap at the door. I opened the door and in came Mrs. Dabney.



"Oh, Mis' Preece," she wailed, wringing her hands, "I'm a-losin' her, I'm a-losin' her."

"What happened, Mrs. Dabney? Can I help you?" I asked, trying to hide my impatience.

"It's Nora, my young-un. She done gone to the Devil sure, an me a-tryin so hard to keep her in the right path. Looka there," she moaned, pointing to a penciled sheet of paper. "Look what she done wrote in that letter," Mrs. Dabney said as she handed the sheet to me.

"Mama, I got my first allotment check from Dick yesterday, and I done made a date in the beauty parlor to get a permanent wave in my hair."

Mrs. Dabney reached into her pocket. She pulled out a booklet, "Bible Prophecy of Today's Events," by Rev. Fred Koerber, and pointed her finger for me to read:

"Isa. 3:24 And it shall come to pass . . . that instead of well-set hair, baldness;

"This is a warning to the Israelitish women in the last days. Today, the Jews and Gentiles alike are having their hair set."

That floored me. All I could get out was the senseless question: "Is Nora's hair blond?"

Mrs. Dabney sidestepped a direct answer, took the letter from my hand and ran her hand through my short hair, saying: "Now, yores is natural, ain't it, Mis' Preece?"

"Yes," I said, uncomfortably. Then she patted her own smooth, steel-gray hair and said: "Ain't it a pity that most of them Jews what's nothin but the Tribe of Judah has got curly hair, an us, the real Israelites, jest got plain straight hair?" Then she sat down in the rocker and, making herself at home, made herself more familiar.

"Now, Sister Celia, how come you wear that short hair-cut? You know that Paul done said that a woman's hair is her crownin glory." Allie, I figured, had told her my first name and gossiped about my bob to her.

Harold walked in and out of the room three times with quick, nervous steps. I shifted from one foot to the other, wondering how I was going to work myself out of this.

"Sister Celia," she finally said to me, not knowing how her familiarity set with us, "Brother Armstrong done tole us over the radio that we ain't got no need to send money fer his new book, *The United States in Prophecy*, right away. But you know they can't carry on the Lord's work lessen Lord-fearin people hep em do it. Can you loan me bout thirty cents worth of stamps to send him so as I can git that little book? Now, I aim to give em back to you jest as soon as Joel gits that job hepin them folks fix their chimney acrost the tracks."

I went to the bookshelf, picked up the envelope full of stamps and gave Mrs. Dabney ten three-cent stamps. She clutched those stamps to her bosom and said: "Lord bless you, Sister Celia.

"You hear all that talk bout peace an all them countries comin together to have lastin peace. But that's folks talkin without knowin a word of what it says in the Word bout our country. I'll let you study that, too, Sister Celia, jest as soon as I git it."

I thanked Mrs. Dabney for the promise of the literature as we walked to the door together. She invited herself over for the coming Sunday as Harold made his fourth angry trip into the room.

I closed the door with a sigh, and turned to face what I knew would be a storm.

"Now, you know good and well Uncle Billy is coming over Sunday," he said irritably to me.

"Now, look," I countered. "Did I invite her?"

Then Harold laughed apologetically and grew a little philosophical about our friends—all the saints and sinners whom we had known. And he could well afford to be both

intimate and philosophical about them, for he has spent most of his life with them, and more than fifteen years studying them.

"You know, darling," Harold said to me, "it's hard to see people taken in by men who preach the gospel of hate. It's the bad seed sown among the people. The fruits are hate: hate of the Jew, hate of the Negro, hate of a government which tries to function for the age of the machine rather than the age of the bull-tongue plow, hate of labor unions, hate of liberal religious agencies preaching a 'social gospel,' such as the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ, hate of the 'communist', which can mean almost anybody, hate . . .

"And the fields being plowed by the sowers of hate are the small sects. For here the soil has already been fertilized with resentment and frustration. The resentment of workers whose yesterday was want and whose tomorrow is 'don't know.' The frustration of little storekeepers being shoved out of the picture by the bigger economics of a bigger world. The bitter disappointment of farmers who reap nothing but debts and mortgaged crops. And all the plaguing little irritations which beset little people whose world has been little: ration points and gas stamps, the foreigner who's got the best business in town, the smart 'Jew boy' who went off to college and became a doctor, while Johnny never got to be anything but a gas station attendant before the draft board got him and sent him off to war.

"Here, too, the soil is promising, because the people of the small sects can be worked up over small issues, such as the right way to baptize, the sinfulness of women who smoke, and the immodesty of girls who wear bobby socks."

"Yes," I said to Harold, moodily thinking that the prophets of the Crooked Cross understand all too well how to whittle a large issue down to even a "hair-do." Then they dress it

up with shiny catch words, sugar-coat it with a phrase or two lifted out of context from the Word, and present it to a fearful, confused Mrs. Dabney in hell-raising, hair-raising language of "believe it or be damned."

Sunday rolled around cool but clear. We wondered what Uncle Billy with his Two-Seed theology and his universal heart would think of the Dabneys and their radio prophets.

Before Harold had a chance to finish his Sabbath shave, I heard a knocking at the door. Thinking that it might be Uncle Billy, I called to Harold to go to the door since I was busy with the baby.

He had hardly dried the last dab of shaving cream from his ear lobe when our impatient neighbor, Mr. Dabney, opened the door and loudly called, "Good mornin' there, Brother Harold," and the rafters rang with his resonant voice. "Looka here what Rev. J. Frank Norris from yore home state of Texas done sent my woman. It's his paper, *The Fundamentalist*."

I murmured a silent little prayer of thankfulness in my heart that Brother Harold was the one he had summoned and that the "pistol-totin'" parson was the subject.

"Oh, listen here to what Brother Norris says: '. . . he (the Beast) will be on the scene a long time be-fore he is re-vealed. Fer instance, the Pres-ee-dent of the U-nited States has been in the world—not yit sixty year—but he was here many years be-fore he was made Pres-ee-dent. An so the Beast will be on the earth, a full grown man, an then when he gits in his power, an in his es-state, an the time comes fer him to be re-vealed, to be man-i-fest, the whole world will know him. He won't be a child born then an grow up, but he will be a man already on the scene.

"The question that is asked is—'Is he on the scene now?'

"I don't know; he may be."

"Well," Harold interrupted, "Brother Dabney, I think Mr.

Roosevelt is a pretty good man. He's done a lot for the poor man."

"Yes sir," Mr. Dabney chimed in. "Now, I think Mr. Roos-ee-velt done a pretty good job to hep the pore folks. I know the WPA sure did keep me an the children from starvin. But somethin's gotta be done bout them Jews and niggers he's been coddlin, an' this the country of us genu-wine white Israelites."

Harold shook his head but said nothing. I got the baby ready and went to put him in his little play pen on the front porch. Then I saw Mrs. Dabney running through the gate.

"Sister Celia," she yelled, "I sure do thank you fer them stamps you give me. I mailed em right off to Brother Armstrong fer that fine book of hisn. I hope the Lord'll lead you to spare me a few more so I can keep on gittin them papers." In one hand, she carried a copy of *Bible News Flashes*, published by Prophet W. D. Herrstrom in Mineapolis, and a copy of *Now*, a little paper issued by the millionaire missionary, R. G. Le Tourneau, in Peoria, Illinois, to advertise both his brand of religion and his brand of tractors. In the other hand she had Brother Koerber's book and a copy of Brother Hodges' *Prophetic Times*.

"Oh, you needn't worry, Mrs. Dabney," I answered. "They know that a lot of good Christian people are poor. They never stop sending them to you because they know you'll influence other people with them."

"Now, that's the trouble with lots of folks, Sister Celia," Mrs. Dabney whined. "They expect the good brothers to print up all them fine books an papers an let the other feller foot the bill. We jest gotta hep em."

I was positive that I was giving no more postage to Mrs. Dabney to help spread hate masking as holiness. At that minute Harold and Mr. Dabney came out to join us. Mrs. Dabney, with the zeal of a fanatic, turned to *Bible News*

*Flashes* and read from Brother Herrstrom's little hate sheet a parody composed by one Fred C. Schulz, of Los Angeles, published in the paper:

“ ‘Our President who is in Washington,  
Franklin Delano Roosevelt is his name.  
His kingdom has come, to see it be done  
In the United States as in Russia.  
He rations our daily bread,  
He burdens U. S. with debt, but forgives our debtors.  
He leads U. S. into temptations, and delivers U. S. to the CIO.  
For that is his power.  
He is in his glory  
But not forever.  
Oh-man!’ ”

The baby began howling. I didn't know whether he was tired of "prophecy" or tired of the play pen. I picked him up and carried him into the house, with Mrs. Dabney following me saying, "I was wonderin, Sister Celia, ef you could spare me a little washin powder. I'm aimin to git me a big bill of groceries when Joel takes that chimney job an I'll pay it back." As I pointed silently to my box of washing powder on the shelf, I could hear Mr. Dabney reading to Harold in what failed to be an undertone:

“ ‘I pledge al-le-giance to the De-mo-crac-tic Party an to the Roos-ee-velt Family fer which it stands. One family, indi-spen-sa-ble with di-vorce an cap-tain-cies fer all. Four thous-an years ago, Moses said, "Pick up yore shovels, load yore asses, mount yore camels, an foller me to the Promised Land." Four thous-an years later, Roos-ee-velt said, "Throw down yore shovels, set on yore asses, light up yore Camels, this is the Promised Land." ’ ”

And I could hear Harold answer in an ominous voice, "Mr. Dabney, if that stuff isn't fit for women to hear, it isn't fit for anybody to hear. I don't like that 'Oath of Allegiance to the New Deal' which you've just read and I think mighty well of

Mr. Roosevelt. As far as I'm concerned, Prophet Herrstrom and *Bible News Flashes* are blasphemy any way you slice it."

Harold is a hillman, too, and feuding is not foreign to his nature. I put the baby in the crib and stepped quickly on to the porch. "There's Uncle Billy coming through the gate," I said, "with the little chair that he promised to make for the baby."

Our beloved friend was smiling when he started through the gate. But his face froze when he saw who our visitors were and he greeted them in a curt manner that isn't like Uncle Billy. When he sat down, I told him that our David would prize the fine, sturdy chair and cherish and keep it for his children. I promised also that he would know the story of the Carpenter, and would know Uncle Billy the carpenter, who had made the chair for him.

I went inside to get a glass of water for Uncle Billy. When I came out Mrs. Dabney was reading another choice bit from *Bible News Flashes*.

"The New Dealers are howlin their heads off bout the "racial" problems in America. They ferget that nobody ever heered the term, "anti-Sem-i-tism" in our country until the New Deal came along, an spit in the face of American tradition.

"Many people ac-cused of har-bor-in "racial pre-ju-di-ces" are guilty only of believin in "honesty an san-an-tation." Pass all the racial laws you want, but remember, "A Ghet-to by any other name will still smell the same!"

"P. S.: Instead of tryin to force the American people *down* to Ghet-to standards, why not raise the Ghet-to crowd to the level of American standards?"

Uncle Billy shook his bushy head, and began looking across the field. Then he got up and put on his black hat. "Don't rush off, Uncle Billy," Harold said. "We hoped to have the whole day with you."

"Thank you, Brother Harold," the old man answered.

"But I gotta go visit my boy, Ed. He's sufferin with sciatica. I gotta go an comfort him."

Harold's jaw hung limp with disappointment as his eyes followed Uncle Billy across the field. His face was getting madder, and I gave him a slight kick on the shins to make him behave. Mr. Dabney picked up the *Prophetic Times*. "Now, jest listen here, Brother Preece, to what Brother Hodge points out as plain as truth bout these here false messiahs like Roos-ee-velt an Mussolini an Joe Stalin.

"'The people of the world have refused to foller God,' " Mr. Dabney intoned. "'Now the Devil is raisin up these false messiahs fer them to foller. In all of our post-war plans, Jesus Christ is not bein mentioned by a single nation. Not even the United States has said anything bout takin God in our post-war plans.' "

"Now, Sister Celia," Mrs. Dabney took up, "I know you all are educated folks. An I want you to read over these prophecies an match em up word fer word from the Scripture to see if Brother Koerber didn't tell us more than all them worldly newspapers that you can read." She passed the booklet to me and I read: "OVER 125 BIBLE PROPHECIES FULFILLED SINCE THE FIRST WORLD WAR. Air-planes Cover Land, Ezek. 38:9; Armored Tanks Wreak Havoc, Joel 2:4-7, Thousands Seek Air Raid Shelters, Isa. 2:19."

I took the booklet from her, and my eye ran over the titles on the cover. I began to turn its pages quickly and Mrs. Dabney put in: "Now, you gotta study that real slow an go over it agin an agin an the truth'll dawn on you as bright as the stars in heaven."

I stopped short at page 18, where I read:

. . . ABUNDANCE OF IDLENESS—(Lately we have had numerous strikes; men desiring shorter hours—five-day weeks—longer rest periods. Women cry for more labor-saving devices. Electric washers—vacuum cleaners—automatic dish washers;



ironing machines; flakes that clean without rubbing; escalators; doors opened by electric eye; food prepared for eating. Yes, the desire is for an abundance of idleness.)

"Mercy," I thought to myself as I finished that paragraph, "my whole heart's desire is one whole solid black sin." And over on the next page I saw:

WOMEN ARE TAKING MEN'S PLACES AND SAYING, 'WE ARE STRONG.' Joel 3:10 . . . Let the weak say, I am strong.

"In every country of the world today, women are taking the places in commerce, industry, the business life and the farm life which have formerly been occupied by men. The war has taken the man power to the battle fronts of almost every nation, hence these vacancies are filled by women, girls and in some countries, small children, who say, 'We are strong.' Our own Country, today, is tabulating women power for any contingency that may arise.

After running through several pages I stopped at page 25, where I read:

DICTATORS, POLITICAL HEADS, UNION HEADS, PUBLIC OFFICIALS, THE UNDERWORLD AND MANY OTHERS ARE FIERCE TODAY.

II Tim. 2:3 For men shall be . . . fierce.

I kept turning the pages, and my eyebrows kept moving up and down. Harold was lost in a deep study and Mr. Dabney was watching me closely.

"Yes," Mr. Dabney said, "that little book's got plenty to keep you an Mr. Preece busy quite a spell." Harold brought the rocker to such a jerky stop that he scared the baby. I looked toward the gate. It surely was good to see Brother Dee coming up the walk. Brother Dee was a life-saver for us that morning.

"We was jest talkin bout them Jews and niggers an labor unions when you come in," Mr. Dabney addressed the Holi-

ness "Bishop." "Maybe you, as one of the Lord's preachers of the Word, might give us a idee bout it."

Brother Dee rubbed his hands slowly on the knees of his worn breeches and answered in a double-edged drawl: "Well, now, Brother an Sister Dabney, you take a man like me. I been doin the work of the Lord these many years an I ain't never run into a Jew what's got a million dollars. I reckon all these preachers a-talkin hate agin Jews an CIO's an agin colored folks, is jest twistin the Word into a mighty bad shape, more to suit their pocketbooks than to fit the Spirit.

"In my days of servin the Lord, there has been many a Brother what's tried my patience.

"But I ain't had it in my heart to hate any of em, not even Constable Jim Earl. Fer ever time the Spirit took hold of me to hate him, I got down on my knees an prayed to the Lord to whup it out of me a-fore it et me up.

"Don't the Word say that there ain't no difference between Jew or Greek, bond or free? You ought to go back an read the Book of Romans, Brother Dabney, where the Apostle Paul tole them Gentiles what got the Word from the Jew that they ain't got no cause to be throwin off on the Jews.

"'Sides," and Brother Dee looked mad in his eyes, "ain't Sister Celia a Jew? An ain't she livin in a log cabin like the rest of us?"

Mr. Dabney sat glued to his chair, not looking either of us in the eye for a long minute. When he did raise his head and start to gaze reproachfully at my husband for having married outside "the true Israel," Harold shot him a "get to hell out of here and don't come back" look. Mrs. Dabney was glaring at me with the eyes of those mediaeval inquisitors who burned Jews and then prayed for their souls.

Finally, Mr. Dabney got up from his chair and said gruffly: "Come on, Mother, we'd better be gittin home. Brother Armstrong'll be on the air agin in half a hour."

Mr. Dabney picked up every single piece of the literature.

Mrs. Dabney held tight to the box of washing powder. Then without a word, the two marched off the porch.

"That's good Christian doctrine you handed them, Brother Dee," Harold laughed. "Stick around. Maybe, Celia'll be fry-ing up that chicken that Aunt Tut killed and dressed for her yesterday."

By that time, the Dabneys had slammed the gate shut.

"Well, all right, Brother Harold," our friend answered. "But them folks has done almost took the taste fer good Sunday eatin out of my mouth. Sounded like to me they'd been chawin on some bitterweeds stead of them fine tarnip greens you done raised in yore garden."



## GOD'S REMNANT PEOPLE

Oh, when shall I see Jesus  
And look upon His face  
And hear that trumpet  
Sound in the morning?



## "I STAND AT ARMAGEDDON"

Whenever Celia and I walked down some quiet lane to visit a neighbor, we could not help but think how far removed was this country of the Word from all the countries at war.

Aunt Tut and Brother Dee and all our other neighbors knew more about the siege of Jericho than about the siege of Stalingrad. Eisenhower, Nimitz, Patton—these were names they knew vaguely from the few people about who had newspapers left in their mailboxes when Mr. Charlie made his morning run. Generals Joshua, Saul and David were the familiar names in these little pine-board shanties. Uncle Rense, the Sunday School superintendent, might know little about the two World Wars fought in his time—since he had never bought a newspaper in his life. But he could hold you spellbound for hours talking about General Joshua's strategy in Canaan Land or how "Ol King David come a-tearin out of them hills to whup the Philistines."

The country of the Word remembers best the wars whose record is the Word. It looks back to Jericho when the children of Israel, under Joshua, histed their flag over Canaan Land. It looks forward to Armageddon when the redeemed saints from Lane's Cove to Holy Water will follow the flag of General Michael to a shouting, hallelujah victory over the Devil and his troopers with cloven hooves.

Armageddon wasn't on our mind that morning when we left the baby with a disapproving Sister Allie to take a before-breakfast swim in the old baptizin pond called Holy Water. But the heavy black cloud that came up from the west, after we had been paddling around for a few minutes, was bothering us.

"Better get on our clothes and start moving for home," Celia said. "Looks like the Lord's going to pour down his rain on the unjust in a couple of seconds."

"What you get for not listening to Sister Allie about them sinful slacks and bathing suits," I answered. "Don't you know that no Lord-fearing lady strips off her duds in the open and goes swimming like those picture hussies in the magazines?"

We waded up the bank in our swim suits and made for the big rock where we had left our "decent" clothes. Then we stopped and stared. For there on top of the rock stood a short, fat, bald-headed little man looking up at the gathering cloud through a telescope a yard long held tightly to his left eye.

I coughed politely. The pudgy figure turned and lowered the telescope. Pale blue eyes which seemed to contain some far-off glimmer of another world gave us a quick survey, lingering over Celia's bare arms and legs. The eyes strayed to where our clothes lay piled in two heaps at the foot of the boulder. I heard a reproachful voice saying:

"Behold I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

"Wouldn't be much of a loss if you did take them," I answered, "but Constable Jim Earl might get mad if he saw us walking around naked. That's a bad-looking cloud over there."

The figure skipped down from the rocks with the quick motion of the ground squirrels denned up in the patch of woods back of our cabin.

"Why, Brother, a cloud don't scare up any fits if you're watchin for the Lord's comin." The twang of that voice sounded strange, different from the slow, drawling old-English which is the mark of those native to the Country of the Word.



“Clouds are mighty good signs if you’re one of the watchers. The Lord ascended to Heaven on a cloud with His disciples watchin. That’s the way He’ll come back—on a cloud with His disciples watchin. Most any day I come out here I can see Him through my telescope. I can see him tryin on his robes, gettin ready to step on a cloud to take His holy Sabbath-keepers back with Him to judge the world for a thousand years. He’s mighty near ready, Brother. He might come down this very minute.

“Now you take that cloud up there,” he went on, pointing his forefinger to the sky. “It just means rain to Sunday-keepers and other folks who see without the eye of faith. But it’s another sure sign of the Lord’s comin to His watchers and Sabbath-keepers.

“This mornin I’ve been watchin that cloud with the eye of faith. I’ve seen the Lord gettin ready for the Battle of Armageddon. I’ve seen Him dressin up His soldiers in uniforms as white as snow. I’ve seen Him puttin bits and bridles made of pure gold in the mouths of His horses that’s two thousand feet high. I’ve seen Him polishin up the swords that’ll lop off the horns of the Devil and His angels quicker’n meat-eatin sinners can wring the neck of some poor old chicken.

“Brother, this war is going to end up in Armageddon. The Lord’s signs are sure. It’s been one hundred years this year since old Brother William Miller saw the signs and thought the Lord was comin down. But it won’t be another hundred years. Now is the time because the Good Book says that He’ll be comin when there’s wars and rumors of wars.

“It’s all writ down here,” and the stranger pulled a thin magazine out of his pocket. It bore the title, *The Watchman*, printed in white on a blue cover. The little man’s voice and manner changed as he said in a brisk, business-like tone, “You can read all about it for fifteen cents.”

“I’m sorry. We didn’t bring any money with us.”

"That's all right," he replied, thrusting the copy at me. "I'll credit you." He turned to Celia. "You must be that Hebrew lady I've been hearin' about and I've been meanin' to bring Lady Myers over to call on a fellow Sabbath-keeper accordin' to Scripture. You don't do any work on Saturday?" he demanded to know.

I came to my wife's rescue. "She doesn't hardly do any work on any other day," I answered for her.

That was the beginning of a long and at times pestiferous acquaintance with Brother Myers the Watcher. But through him also began our acquaintance with the history and lore of the Adventist faith now numbering 200,000 souls, split up into nine or ten clashing sects. The Seventh Day Adventist Church to which Brother Myers belonged is much the biggest, considerably larger than all the others put together.

From Brother Myers we first heard the story of William Miller, the original Adventist prophet, whose predictions of Christ's second coming, elaborately figured out from the apocalyptical numbers of the Book of Daniel, had caused thousands of people all over the country to give away their worldly goods, even their farms and stores, stripping themselves of all but their ascension robes, while waiting for the great day. When the Lord failed to appear—"the Great Disappointment of 1844"—the followers of William Miller split up into a dozen quarreling little remnants and the old prophet himself, weighed down by the abuse heaped upon him, died of heartbreak.

From Brother Myers, too, we learned of the revival, the founding of the new Seventh Day Adventist Church under the leadership of the extraordinary Ellen White, "Messenger of the Third Angel," who told the Adventist remnants to fold away their ascension robes and get back to work; but who assured them, also, that the end of the world was surely coming and coming soon.

To Brother Myers, Ellen the Messenger—with her many revelations as to dietary laws and Sabbath-keeping (the Seventh Day as decreed by Moses)—is as Mohammed to the Moslem or Joseph Smith to the Mormons, although William Miller is recognized as a forerunner. But as with all Christians, and also Jews, the foundation rests on the Old Testament. And the Seventh Day Adventists, like the Mormons, are, theologically speaking, partial to the Jews. Brother Myers always hoped to convert Celia to his faith.

“You’re already first cousin to us, Lady Preece,” he would say during those endless mornings when he came, often routing us out of bed, to have breakfast with us and remain to keep us from our typewriters until stern measures were required to send him on his way. “You keep the Sabbath. I’ve never smelt any bacon cooking on your stove when I come by.” Celia refrained from mentioning the fact that bacon was as rare an item these days as caviar in Mr. Marion’s general store. The old man would ramble on:

“Once you get the truth in the Word through Sister White’s writings, why, then you’ll be in the Israel of Adoption who’re the saints what give up all for the truth. Now you was *born* in the Israel of the Flesh; but the time’s comin when you’ll come over to the Israel of Adoption. And just before Armageddon the Israel of the Flesh and the Israel of Adoption will be made one. And when you go the whole way, why Brother Preece will be trackin right behind you. I can see by his eyes that he’s a man what cares for his wife like a Christian husband ought to do.”

Brother Myers found a box of crayons on the road, probably the lost property of some school child, which gave him a new excuse for coming over for a long visit. Now he would demonstrate his mathematical proof. First he stood on a stump in the back yard and gazed at the heavens through his telescope. “Uh huh,” he grunted while Sister Allie swished her broom disdainfully over the porch. “It’s comin about

just like I saw it when I was a boy in Kansas. There's General Michael with a brand-new uniform cut right to fit. There's the Adventist saints that's gone before, holdin their shields and harps, gettin ready for Armageddon."

Then, carefully laying aside the telescope, he took his crayons and began to figure, drawing up a chart of "the time of the end" on my paper to which he helped himself in quantity. We were to become very familiar with these charts which consisted of elaborate tables of figures with explanations stemming from the Book of Daniel and Revelation, all going to prove beyond shadow of doubt that the end would come on June 19—or September 22 or some other date. The fact that no two charts ever came out the same never seemed to trouble Brother Myers. He handed each of them to me as he finished it, solemnly recommending that I send it in to "one of them papers you write for."

And all this time I was shelling out dimes and quarters for the latest editions of Ellen White's revelations, the latest pamphlets on Armageddon, the most recent numbers of little periodicals hot from the presses of the half-dozen Adventist publishing houses. And still Brother Myers continued making charts. And still the Lord tarried.

## CHAPTER XVII

### WATCHERS OF A HUNDRED YEARS

Hundreds of these unfortunate fanatics are now in hospitals, and in the official report from that of Worcester, the number there on account of religious frenzies nearly equals the number caused by intemperance.

From an old book, *Boston Notions*,  
published by Nathaniel Dearborn, 1848.

Brother Myers was not alone in his watch for the coming of the Lord during the war-torn year of 1944, centenary year of the Adventist folk. One hundred years after the Great Disappointment, during which time the faithful had never ceased to watch and pray, came a flurry of excitement and hope to the sky-watching progeny of William Miller and Ellen White. And our Adventist neighbors shared in the new eagerness.

Brother Swallow, who lived a mile down the road, was so certain that the year 1944 would wind up the accounts of this mangled, blood-soaked earth that he sacrificed both his daughter and his mule to his faith. He changed his mind about sending his girl to an Adventist college, figuring it would be a sinful waste of money with time so near an end; and he starved his mule to death on the sparse mountain grass, figuring it was foolish to buy hay and oats in these latter days.

Current Adventist literature, peddled from door to door, struck the loud note of doom in its interpretations of what was happening in a tortured, swift-changing world. And the note continues even though the Lord tarried while the clock ticked in a new year.

Thus gloomily the editor of *The Watchman*, Brother Robert Leo Odom, under the title "The Perils of the Postwar Peace,"

predicts an unholy alliance of national governments with a united front of the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish religions to insure the coming of the reign of Antichrist and Apollyn foretold in the Scriptures.

"The most striking thing in the current planning for the postwar peace," writes Brother Odom, "is that popular and powerful ecclesiastical organizations are taking the lead and have launched already a crusade for 'a Christian world order.'"

The very aspirations of men and women the world over, of which most of us doubt the realization, Brother Odom sees as about to be fulfilled. But it is all for evil. He goes on:

"The word of God indicates in the last days a politico-religious peace movement. . . . One Christian group will not be represented in the politico-religious movement for world peace. It will be God's remnant people [meaning the Adventists], the faithful called out of modern Babylon. . . . This group will be persecuted—'driven out' and cast out—by the others."

God's remnant people have lived on in the faith over a century of persecution—persecution in which they rejoice and the weakening of which, in these soft days, they deplore. Materially they have not thrived. But they do not envy the great worldly success of the Mormons, whose very name of Latter Day Saints indicates their original kinship. Indeed, they came out of the same milieu, the same decade; stemmed from the same theological background. The 1830's and 1840's were prolific in the spawning of religious sects and schisms; and this, too, was the period of the communistic societies, the experimental Utopias that continued to flourish through the middle of the century. The Adventists themselves attempted more than one commune after the Great Disappointment—what was left of those who did not go over to swell

the ranks of Mormon, to join Shaker villages or to disperse themselves elsewhere amid the welter of sectarianism.

Many present-day Adventists in recent years have moved away from the towns to form tiny communities in remote countrysides where they can grow their own garden sass and secure themselves against the day when nobody may buy a box of crackers or sell a setting of eggs without "the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."

People who live in the sure expectation of the total destruction of this world also lead inward lives that are volcanic, often subject to unpredictable eruptions. Aunt Tut told us that Brother Myers had spent several years in an asylum—a familiar form of the world's persecution of the saints from the beginning of their history. William Miller, formerly a highly respected citizen, was accused of monomania and, more specifically, theomania. To the world they are a deranged folk, suicidal, paranoiac. But they are inured to this kind of abuse. Indeed, their intellectuals invite it, freely admitting that it is a question of whether they're right and the world is wrong, or vice versa. They rejoice in the strange characters that stud their history.

Miller's chief associate, Elder Snow—who had been chiefly responsible for inducing the feeble old patriarch to publish his calculations setting the date of October 22, 1844 for the Second Coming—turning against the discredited leader after the Great Disappointment, installed himself as leader and declared himself to be Elijah the Prophet, returned to earth for the last days, to become ruler of the new dispensation after the Great Day. To "the world" he was merely crazy.

Silas Lamson, called the "White Quaker" because he dressed exclusively in white, emerged as a leader of one of the schisms despite intermittent sojourns in a variety of asylums.

There was war in heaven after the Disappointment. Brother

Silas Lamson, Sister Abby Folsom the poetess and Brother Lemuel Tompkins the whirler had no love for each other. One disappointed Millerite was prosecuted in New York for attempting to sacrifice his child on an altar he had built in emulation of Abraham offering Isaac to the Lord. The literature of the period 1844-48 is a gold mine of case histories in religious mania for any historical psychoanalyst. There was, in the nether world not only of the Millerites but of a hundred other little cults, a mass hysteria, exceeding even the extravagances of the era of the Kentucky Revival a quarter of a century earlier.

Nor need one depend on the writings of worldly scoffers for his case studies. The Seventh Day Adventist's official historian, Elder J. N. Loughborough, makes no apology for aberrational behavior on the part of the saints. He tells us, scornfully, that proposals were made to place Adventist missionaries under guardians even before the Great Disappointment. The scoffing sinner and worldly professor, he says, decided that this work of scattering advent publications must be stopped. . . .

These men who were taking a township or a whole county and going from house to house with this advent doctrine, and neglecting their businesses and families, must be beside themselves, they said, and must therefore have guardians placed over them. . . . The alleged evidences of an unsound mind exhibited by the believers (being simply labor for the salvation of their fellow-men . . .) were insufficient proof of insanity; consequently but few persons were placed under guardianship.

But Brother Loughborough tells some strange tales. For example, there is the tragic record of Elder Joseph Stephens of Paris, Maine. He refused to acknowledge the divine authority of Ellen White, who emerged after the Great Disappointment to found the Seventh Day Church. Ellen ordered the faithful back to work; Stephens continued to hold fast to the faith that in these last days all work was sin. Ellen



rose in his church and predicted that he would commit suicide, and under her whiplashing tongue he wilted. The congregation voted him out. The unhappy man lost his reason and went on a long fast, "refusing to eat anything cooked by the wicked." When he could no longer walk from starvation, he crawled to his bed, made a rope of sheets and hanged himself.

Two Wisconsin preachers, Brothers Hall and Stephenson, were leaders of a rebellion against the Prophetess, calling themselves "The Age to Come" faction. Of these misguided brothers, Historian Loughborough writes:

"Mr. Hall became somewhat demented (occasioned by softening of the brain). . . . He labored under the delusion that if he should go out-of-doors he would flatten out, or down to earth. He is harmless. . . . Elder Stephenson . . . for several years before his death was of unsound mind (insane) though not dangerous to others. Before coming thus, under the liberty which he supposed he had with the no-law theory he had espoused, he left his own wife, a woman against whom no stain of virtue was claimed (he could get a divorce only by employing a dishonest lawyer), and married another woman much younger than his former wife."

Elder Stephenson, who wandered off into strange doctrine, was one of many who, according to history—often prejudiced, it is true—wandered into strange beds. Such strayings have been the matter of much concern in Adventist writings; and they continue to be so. We discovered this concern in the pages of the literature furnished us by Brother Myers. In what would seem a rather too revealing article by a Sister Mary Kuhn in an issue of *The Watchman*, "Keep the Home Intact—Some Good Counsel about that Third Party," in which the good sister is concerned about "triangles"—or what in sophisticated circles would be called the *menage à trois*—we read the following:

Through the years, I have watched the working out of this strange problem. There was a certain clergyman who brought his sister to live in his home. His wife was like her husband's sister in many ways. All three were Christians and the partnership was perfect; for the third person was the minister's sister, not his wife's sister. . . .

Another minister, desiring to help a girl having a hard time, gave her a place in his home. She was treated as one of the family. She broke up the family, ruined the man's career, and marred the happiness of his children. . . .

A third person, an outsider, entering the family, causes another angle. It may not always hold true that the third person causes the trouble, but he may. It is always best, especially until the husband and wife have been married for some years, to keep the family intact. Even then, great caution should be used in the selection of guests. Where a grandmother or a grandfather is a member of the family, the problem is usually negligible.

We should think so! For another piece: A sixteen-year-old girl in a Texas town became involved with the white-haired pastor of her Adventist church. The preacher not only seduced the young girl but committed the heinous sin of taking her to the movies—the first time she had ever been to the movies. The romance was discovered by the girl's mother and the preacher left town between suns. By solemn vote of the congregation, the girl was required to make apology to the preacher's wife and publicly to make confession of her sins before the congregation. The church then forgave her for bedding with the preacher, but placed her on probation (soon broken) for going to the movies.

Of the Prophetess White, vegetarian, pure food and public health authority—forerunner of Battle Creek—as well as impassioned seeress, many extraordinary tales are told—as they were told of Ann Lee, the Shaker prophetess from whom, unquestionably, Ellen borrowed much of her technique and many of her ideas. We may put the wilder stories of her

erotomania down to the revilings of her enemies and spread of gossip—for she was a celebrity of parts. But her concern with modesty in women seems often beyond the normal:

Whatever may be the length of the dress, their limbs should be clothed as thoroughly as are the men's. This may be done by wearing lined pants, gathered into a band and fastened about the ankle, or made full and tapering at the bottom; and these should come down long enough to meet the shoe. The limbs and ankles thus clothed are protected against a current of air. If the feet and limbs are kept comfortable with warm clothing, the circulation will be equalized, and the blood will remain pure and healthy in its natural passage through the system.

Happily, in these latter days lady Adventists do not parade the streets in any such costume. We were told not long ago by Brother Myers, the colporteur killing time until the end of time, about a purchase he had just made: "I've been down to Chattanooga and bought Lady Myers some pretty frilly pink pants. You know how it is with your wife, Brother Preece. They like anything that's close to them to feel and look nice."

It is no far cry from the saints of old to Brother Myers, however. He is in the great tradition. Brother Myers's yellow coffin might have belonged to the White Quaker or any other of the saints of whose might and the deeds that they did we read in Adventist chronicles. Brother Myers's yellow coffin, which he uses temporarily as a bathtub, is a kind of insurance. He bought it, he says, just in case the Lord was still tarrying when his Angel called him to come up higher.

Even to a greater degree than his telescope, the coffin is Brother Myers's pride. He had it made specially to fit his short, plump body. He rode down to the city in a truck with another Adventist brother to pick it up when it was completed, and—so the story goes—suddenly disappeared on the way home. The brother turned the truck around and

began to back-track down the road, fearing Brother Myers might have been seized with one of his spells and fallen from the seat. Then gradually he became aware of a faint tapping. Stopping to listen, he decided that the sounds came from inside the coffin. Grabbing a hammer from the tool box, he pried open the lid and—of course—there lay Brother Myers just beginning to turn blue in the face.

But Brother Myers had no intention of getting out of his coffin. He only wanted the lid open so that he could sit up in the yellow box and so ride into town, down the little village Main Street, waving gaily at all and sundry.

"Why didn't you get a double-bed coffin so that Lady Myers can go up with you?" we asked the old man one morning when he came by with his telescope in one hand, his satchel of books and pamphlets in the other.

"Well, it's like this," he said. "If Lady Myers goes up by herself, she can do her own pickin. And you can never tell. I might find some spry little birdie flyin around up there myself."

They are kindly folk, our friends the Myerses—despite their hope for the utter destruction of all but themselves and their brethren. Brother Myers gives as he takes, taking whatever one may be induced to give him, but giving freely, too, of what he has to those poorer than himself—be they Sabbath-keepers or Sunday-keepers. And Lady Myers goes out to nurse the sick, whether saints or gentiles, and whether or not they pay.

Seventh Day Adventists, following in the train of their prophetess, Ellen White—a woman of the order of genius, however aberrational she may appear to worldly folk—give freely of their queer vegetarian concoctions made in their own factories and sold cheaply in Adventist health stores. On the worldly side, which seems an anomaly, they have,

through their health teachings and missions, their charities to the sick and their battle against malnutrition (however unorthodox in theory) contributed to the better being of the hog and hominy country. Because of the certainty, and the immediacy, of justice to come, they can afford to be gentle and kindly in their daily lives. With a dreadful certainty, they know that the meek shall inherit the earth.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### FEUDIN UNDER THE OLIVES

Our nature has not changed, neither has the nature of the swine, therefore God's children should, and we know they will, heed such lessons and be careful in their eating.

Brother A. N. Dugger of the Church of  
God (Seventh Day), Salem, West Virginia.

Yep! But I'd shore hate to trust em behind the church house with a good piece of pork.

Sister Allie Thompson Watkins.

Three thousand Sabbath-keeping saints of the two feuding Churches of God (Seventh Day) have trimmed their lamps glowing with the light of that imminent Second Coming prophesied weekly in the rival columns of the two feuding *Bible Advocates*. Three thousand people, watching the hands of their dollar alarm clocks for that hour when they will go flying to the Mount of Olives, preen their wings with the oil of wisdom dropping from the sanctified tongues (respectively) of those bitter-enders to a finish fight—Brother Dugger and Brother Davison.

From Maine to California, the Saturday-loving sisters of the rival sects are packing big washtubs with loaves of home-made bread and jars of home-canned garden stuff against that great feast of the ingathering on the first day of judgment.

"The kids may get hungry and their wings may get tired flyin through the air before they light down on the Mount of Olives," a good lady who sends in her tithes to Brother Davison's office at Stanbury, Missouri, told us when we stopped to visit her in a little Michigan town. "I guess the grown saints can wait till we set the table when we get there

on the mountain. But the stomachs of the little fellers sure start groanin if you don't give em a snack between meals."

But there will be no slab of bacon, neither slice of ham, in the flying rations of the elect—those to be borne on God's great, rushing winds to the taking-off place at Stanberry, Missouri, and those to take off from the peaks of the Blue Ridge before landing at Salem, West Virginia, to join Brother Dugger.

"Bacon grease is no more good for lubricatin wings than it is for lubricatin your stomach," said the husband of the lady in Michigan, working over his truck loaded with cherries for the Chicago market.

If the sound of Gabriel's trumpet startles any saint while eating bacon on the sly, he will be doomed to remain below, listening to the happy shouts of his brethren on the holy mountain before the earthly mountains belch forth their destruction and crush him into eternal nothingness. For nobody with a speck of bacon in his craw shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven and whosoever is charged up with a piece of the flesh of the swine on the books of the general store shall be charged with it also in the Lord's Book of Life.

Noah committed the original sin when he permitted the pair of hogs to enter the Ark. "The Ark," one of Brother Davison's preachers in Nebraska told us gravely, "was the symbol of the Seventh Day Church of God, and the hog is the symbol of the Devil. Our Church is the Ark for God's people to find refuge in against the day of trouble. If a hog ever got through the door, Brother Davison would tear down general headquarters and make the saints dig down in their pockets for a new building. The Bible says that the Church must be pure and virtuous like a bride going out to meet her husband. And who ever heard of a decent woman meeting her husband chewing on an old greasy piece of bacon rind?

"Trouble is, the Devil is always there to tempt the saints who've boarded the Ark. He tempted old man Dugger to

start a split-off church back in 1933, just about the time we were getting ready to set up world headquarters in Jerusalem. Well, he tempted Noah to take hogs into the Ark. And I guess, Brother, that hogs have done more to mess up the plan of salvation handed down to the Seventh Day Church of God than all the Duggers—coming back from trips to Jerusalem and leading half the Church of God out of the Ark into a paddleboat.”

The passengers on Brother Dugger’s little lifeboat of Zion are admittedly bailing for dear life in that uncharted and unpredictable sea where sail the ships of over three hundred Christian denominations of America. According to Brother Dugger’s *History of the True Church*, written in collaboration with his once bosom friend, Brother C. O. Dodd, ten thousand people were invited to join the schism when it split off back in the first year of the New Deal. He doesn’t say how many responded to an appeal which claimed Benjamin Franklin and the Sunday-suffering Puritans as true Sabbath-keepers and, in a sense, as forerunners—along with many others. We don’t know how many showed up for that historic session of fasting and prayer which gave birth to another infant—puny but kicking—in the quarrelsome family of Adventist sects. By last reports, however, after more than a decade of struggle and blasts and counterblasts, Brother Dugger’s little skiff still numbers less than fifteen hundred souls scattered over sixteen states, reaching from Connecticut to California. How many of these are bona fide members and how many are of the far-flung order of what the world calls religious cranks who write in and subscribe to religious periodicals (and are promptly claimed) there is no way of knowing.

This is a disappointing record for Brother Dugger in the internecine warfare between his forces and those of Brother Davison, whom he hoped to rout utterly but who has more than held his own. But entry into that world capital of



golden turrets, the new Jerusalem, once the beasts of Revelation have chewed and clawed each other to annihilation on the field of Armageddon, has nothing to do with counting noses. The fact that the only true Church of God makes few proselytes in these last days, despite the free correspondence course in Bible prophecy offered and Brother Dugger's expensive gospel appeals over the radio (paid for out of tithes from the faithful), although disappointing, is only what might have been expected. Few are those who shall be chosen. Brother Dugger had hoped, however, they would not be quite so few. But he has an explanation for the failure of otherwise good people to enroll. That explanation is, naturally, the hog.

In vain does the good Brother, and his able staff with him, publish to a pig-cursed world, in pamphlet after pamphlet, the solemn truth that only non-pork-eaters "will escape the putrefying sores of the first plague that is coming upon this ungodly age, as well as all the other plagues and impending judgment." With the stars about to fall and the sun about to turn to blood, with great boils about to afflict the bodies of men and invading hordes of insects hatching out in the cockle-burrs to devour all that grows, a wicked and perverse generation barter its only sure chance of salvation—through the Seventh Day Church of God—for a pork sausage or a ham sandwich.

"Mankind has become so depraved through eating unclean meats, having their bodies contaminated with serpent-like worms called *trichinae*, that it is hard to reach them with the loving gospel story," says Brother Dugger in his pamphlet, "Eating to Live or Living to Eat—Which?"

"It is a proven fact," he says, "that what a person eats affects his disposition and nature. A dog that is cross and mean, after being fed vegetables and milk products for a period of seven years, will become gentle and mild. The same is true of lions and tigers from the jungles of Africa."

"Milk and vegetables may tame lions and tigers till they purr like kittens sitting under a stove," admitted the preacher in Nebraska of the Davison branch of the Church of God. "But they never told old man Dugger that. He pulled out because the General Conference was getting ready to kick him out. That was right after he'd come back from Jerusalem where we sent him to get things ready to move our world headquarters to the Lord's own city. Things were going mighty well for the Church of God, Brother. So well that we put up a reward of a thousand dollars to pay anybody who could prove, out of the Bible, that Sunday was the Sabbath.

"Well, sir, things would still have been going on well if old man Dugger hadn't stirred up a stew. There has never been so much trouble in the whole great Adventist movement since that crazy woman, Ellen White, led most of the Lord's remnant off in 1861—founding the world's sect of Seventh Day Adventists, telling the faithful they couldn't even eat Bible-clean meat like roast beef and fried chicken—but only horse fodder. The real Adventists kept on then under the rightful Bible name of the Church of God, the name they have used since William Miller, like John the Baptist before him, first saw the visions of the Lord's coming."

The veins on the preacher's neck stood out like the whipcord in his pants as he described the perfidy of Brother Dugger.

"When old man Dugger got back from Jerusalem he started talking about the way the church was being run. He got all those who could never be elected to anything to arguing against elections. Old man Dugger would get up and argue that the Bible talked about Paul and Timothy working together, but never called them President Paul and Vice President Timothy. He claimed the Church ought to be run by the Seven, who would look after the money like the Seven Deacons of the Book of Acts; by the Twelve, to handle spirit-

ual matters; and by the Seventy to go out, two and two, and give the Judgment warning, like the Seventy the Lord sent out from Jerusalem. No voting! No sir! Just put the names in an old hat and the first names they draw out are it.

"Nigh half our folks went off into apostasy with him. He got them to handclapping and rolling on the floor and goings-on he'd picked up from hanging around the Holy Rollers. He called his organization the Seventh Day Church of God and his miserable little paper the *Bible Advocate*—the same as ours. It's caused us so much shame that we've started calling ourselves the Church of God (Adventist) to keep people from thinking we've got anything to do with Dugger and his apostates calling themselves the Church of God, too, or Seventh Day Church of God.

"But his outfit's breaking up into little pieces!" The preacher's eyes flamed with triumph as dusk gathered over the cold bare plains of his Nebraska. "The Lord protects his remnant Church. He knew there was need of a weeding out. And He's not going to be easy on strayed sheep who try to be Sabbath-keepers and Holy Rollers at one and the same time. But," he added emphatically, "you can say in your writings that there's always a welcome home for the innocent who've been led astray."

Brother Dugger would seem to be an anomolous figure as sovereign over the hierarchy of his Church—the councils of the Seven, the Twelve and the Seventy—drawn from a hat. One can understand the theory of leaving all to chance—or all to God—among an earnest body of Christians seeking, as so many have sought through the two thousand years of Christian history, the return to the original, the "primitive," the Apostolic, the Jewish (as distinguished from Roman) Christian Church. Christian history, theology and apology supply precept and example; and no one of the religious sects or schisms but leans heavily on that vast body of prece-

dent in theological law, of which the lay Christian is usually so ignorant, and compared to which our English Common Law of the lawyers is a simple science. But Brother Dugger has not defined his own role as one speaking with authority.

He is broodingly silent when one questions him about the periodical purges by which he rids himself of all rivals in the fold. Nobody dares mention the name of Brother Dodd, collaborator with him on the official *History of the True Church*, who has launched a new sect of Sabbath-keepers on perilous seas. Nobody likes to discuss with him the reasons for the ousting of Brother O. D. Grimm from his job as editor of the *Bible Advocate*—although Brother Grimm was one of the very first to join him after he returned with a hurricane of trouble from his last trip to Jerusalem.

Brother Dugger stays mad. And he will see his congregations melt away to the last member before he will yield an inch of his authority. He boils with the wrath of an old man prizing that which he established in his big moment, when anybody suggests that the shouting and handclapping practices he inaugurated are contrary to Adventism and attract wrong elements, folks who get religion easily and backslide just as easily.

"The Bible says make a joyful noise to the Lord," one of his preachers in Texas grumbled, looking to the door with a plain hint we should leave. "When a Sabbath-keeper don't shout, that's a sure sign he's down there like the Prodigal Son wallowing with them pigs."

"How do you figure that?" we asked, getting ready to leave.

"I don't have to figure it out cause I done tested it out," he replied angrily. "Every time somebody in my congregation stops shoutin I start checkin. Every time I find they been slippin off an eatin bacon. Caught one of my deacons doin it over by the creek last Tuesday."

As the dollar clocks tick off the seconds till the *blitzkrieg* of Armageddon wakes the sleeping dead, the more peaceful

members of both Seventh Day Churches of God are fearing what may happen if some windy current blows the two glory-bound contingents against each other once the air is filled with winging saints. Many are looking for the worst when the saints of both persuasions start opening their wash-tubs for the feast on the Mount of Olives. For each branch grudgingly admits that a few members of the other branch "who try to live right but don't know no better" will squeeze through under that clause in the law of redemption granting salvation to infants and idiots.

"But infants and idiots can cause a peck of trouble and may need to have their ears boxed, specially if they are old man Dugger's infants and idiots," said the preacher from Nebraska. The harsh rumble of his voice seemed to presage thunder rolling across the Mount of Olives while the two armies of the elect make made for each other amid the ripping and tearing of saintly garments.

"Of course," the preacher went on, "it wouldn't be proper to have a dispute right under the Lord's nose when He's flying halfway into the sky to meet us and take us back to the mountain.

"But I wouldn't put it past old man Dugger and his crowd to slip around the mountain to the backside and tear up the mountain with their howling and their tumbling before the Lord ever got back with us. I reckon the Lord would be mighty angry to see them under His olive trees, littering up the place He'd picked out for His true saints."

One sober peacemaker, with kinfolks in both factions, has suggested that the followers of Brother Dugger light on the mountain from the left side, while the disciples of Brother Davison perch on the trees and rocks located on the right side. "They could each start feasting on their own side till everybody got sort of used to the place," he proposed wistfully. "Bye and bye they'd start noddin to each other and directly they'd start swappin sandwiches.

"Then there'd be no trouble and the Lord could start givin each one his job for the next thousand years. The Bible says that the earth is to be restored after Armageddon, not desolated like Ellen White told her poor de-luded folks. The saints are supposed to help the Lord rule the earth when it is restored. But if there are two parties of em like the Democrats and Republicans, the mix-up's bound to be worse than politics right here in Missouri."

But the peacemakers are not blessed among the rival Churches of God. Brother Dugger's flock in Missouri would hear of no compromise. "It was Brother Dugger who went to Jerusalem," they said. "It was Brother Dugger who stepped on the Mount of Olives and looked down to see, in a vision, what the world would be like when it was restored to the true saints. That was a sign that the Lord meant for us and him to get there first."

There's fighting talk and it looks like tough flying ahead for the watchers of the skies. The clocks are wound and dander is rising. Perhaps the state of affairs reflects a war-torn world. In more peaceful times the congregations of the parent church of both these little sects had been content to bore holes through their church roofs and bide patiently for the Lord to come through and take His children on to glory.

## CHAPTER XIX

### IN YASHUA'S NAME

Brother Squire Leroy Cessna reached into one pocket and pulled out his union card. He reached into the other and pulled out his certificate of ordination as a minister of Assembly Yahveh Beth Israel—commonly known as the Yahvists in that ever-multiplying family of the Saturday-keeping Adventist sects. I noticed that his certificate was emblazoned with the six-pointed Star of David along with a phrase in Hebrew glorifying Yahveh inside the star. A Jewish calendar, distributed by some undertaking company, hung on the wall and the date of the Passover had been circled with a heavy black pencil.

The brother gave me a broad, friendly smile as I passed over my card in the American Newspaper Guild for his inspection. I had liked him immediately, if for nothing else but some indefinable expression in his eyes when we began talking. He had not looked at me with the sour, suspicious gaze I had encountered when I called on a group known as the Pentecostal Sabbath Keepers, people who combine the hysterical worship of the Holiness groups with the strict insistence upon observance of Saturday which often makes Adventists rude and overbearing toward "Sunday-keepers." Brother Cessna liked people. I was sure of that even if most of them, like myself, were ignorant of what he called "the Holy Names"—Yahveh for God and Yashua for Jesus. He handed me back my card and I returned his. There in that big colony of Dixie which is Detroit, I warmed up further when he spoke in a voice that had a trace of a Southern drawl.

"I'm glad that a colored union brother sent you to me,"

he said. "Yashua the Messiah earned His living, like our people who follow Yashua, with His hands. He probably belonged to a carpenters' union, and we ask all of our members to belong to the organization of their trade. If it's a choice between a union which admits only white people and one which takes in both races, we tell them to join the organization which draws no lines of color between Yahveh's children.

"All over the country, the disciples of Yashua are as one. We'd withdraw fellowship from any member who refused to fellowship a Negro. For the salvation of Yashua is to all men, to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. We do not mock Him by stirring up Jew against Gentile or white against Negro. Our people were against the Black Legion here in Detroit, and they are against the Ku Klux Klan and Gerald L. K. Smith's movement today. We condemned the race riot, and we opened up our church doors when it came, so that Negroes, fleeing from the mob, might have a safe place to stay until things got under control."

That morning I had come in fresh from Tennessee on the trail of a sect which I had heard spoken about, sometimes admiringly, more often with threatening hostility, in several Southern cities. "Harold, you ought to go over to Paducah, Kentucky, to pick up a sect which I ran across while I was out song-catching," a fellow folklorist who specializes in native American music had told me. "Whites and Negroes sit side by side on the same benches and give each other the holy kiss before the services start. The preacher is a white man—a big stoop-shouldered old fellow with a beard reaching down to his waist which makes him look like Moses.

"Back during the depression, every last one of them—man, woman, and child—belonged to an unemployed organization which was trying to get better relief rations for people out of work. Whenever that organization called for a



demonstration before the city hall, they all turned out—a white man marching by a black man, a white woman by a black woman, a white kid by a black kid, with the preacher out in front, singing hymns which sounded like marching songs. I understand that the Klan sent the preacher a note telling him to turn out his Negro members and stop raising Cain about what the city doled out to the hungry. Otherwise, they said, they'd pay his church a visit and that would be the last service he would hold.

"The old fellow read the letter to his congregation. White members started jumping up saying that they would fight the Klan like the soldiers of David fought the Philistines if anybody came in trying to harm 'our colored brothers.' Then the pastor raised his hand and everybody shut up. 'Let's go on with the service,' he said. 'If Daniel was ready for the lions, we'll be ready for the Klan. Maybe we can tell em something that'll make em shed that old mean hate that they're carrying with em under their floursacks. We'll tell em that a man's soul can't live on hate, and a man's body can't live on them relief beans.' "

"Must be a left wing of Father Divine's movement," I thought. The baby was born about that time so I didn't get down to Paducah to visit the old patriarch and his strange flock which paid no attention to the immemorial racial taboos of the South.

But, later on, I listened to some interesting gossip between a bus driver and a passenger when I was riding through Alabama. "Having any nigger trouble on these busses lately?" I heard the passenger ask. "Not much," the driver said. "But the damndest thing I ever saw, a white man takin up fer a nigger soldier, happened right here on my bus, last week.

"I guess the nigger had got smart and sassy from wearin a uniform. Hell, I wish they'd put em all in uniform and ship 'em all across to the front lines. Anyhow, this buck took a

seat in front of the Jim Crow sign and acted-up derved impudent when I pointed to the sign and told him to git behind it.

"Well, that started the rumpus. The nigger looked at me fer a minute an I looked at him, both of us wantin to drill each other through the heart. He muttered somethin bout havin to fight fer this god-damn country but not bein' able to sit down cept in the back seat over the wheels, and moved mad-like into the nigger section. Then, mister, I was took off my feet by what happened next.

"A big, broad-shouldered white feller jumped up from his seat, walked back down the aisle, and planked hisself by the side of that nigger.

"That made all the other folks on the bus mad an they started millin round the aisle yellin, 'Throw that damn nigger-lover off.' This feller stood up then, pulled somethin out of his pocket that I thought might be a forty-five but turned out to be a Bible, an started preachin bout the nigger bein our brother. Funny thing bout it, he said he was a Southerner an that the South was gone to be turned upside down if it didn't start treatin niggers as equals.

"Well, ever'body was mad an I didn't give a dern what happened to that nigger-lover so long as it didn't happen on my bus. So I asked ever'body to set down. 'I'll turn the nigger-lover over to the police when we make the next stop,' I promised em. 'But you'd better not touch the nigger,' I said, 'Since he's backed up by a lot of smart Yankees so long as he's wearin the uniform.'

"Well, the constable come in an took the nigger-lover off when we got into a town. He didn't try to keep from bein arrested, but I saw a big crowd gatherin round him an the constable when I pulled out. I understand that they give him ten minutes to leave town.

"Well, brother, that ain't the end of it yit. That nigger-lover is still hangin round this part of the country. They tell

me that he went away back in the woods an that he's preachin' ever Sunday to a bunch of raggle-tail white trash an niggers he's got together an calls a church. That's rough country back there where people shoot first an ask questions afterwards, so that nobody's had the nerve to go back an try to stop him.

"But," said the bus driver, shaking his head, "I don't believe that niggers have got souls any more than a mare mule has colts. It beats all what some people think up an call it religion."

I started piecing things together. That congregation in Paducah must be a part of the same communion with that congregation of poor people back in the hills of Alabama. I felt kindly toward that preacher who had testified for the brotherhood of man before a busload of ignorant and prejudiced people. I started looking for the preacher. Finally, through a Negro union member in Alabama, I learned that he had returned to his home in Detroit after leaving behind him several inter-racial congregations of working people in a South which knows lots about religion, but little about the principles of brotherhood which give religion its life.

Two nights after I had met Brother Cessna, I stood with him and with the Yahvist bishop of Detroit, a colored street-sweeper, on East Hancock Street in the heart of Detroit's Negro section. With us, to help conduct outdoor services, stood a Cawtaba Indian preacher of the Church of the Nazarene, and several Negroes who belong to a Holiness sect called the Church of God and Saints of Christ. Somehow, as a white Southerner, I felt something of the spirit of the primitive church which knew no bounds of race or color when Brother Cessna, born in Kentucky, planted the holy kiss on the cheeks of Brother Smith, the Indian, and of Sister Wilson, the Negro.

Brother Smith and Sister Wilson preached and sang about Him they knew as Jesus; Brother Cessna and the colored

bishop about that same Person whom they call Yashua. For the Yahvists—another split off from Brother Dugger's Church of God and even more Judaizing than the average Adventist sect—believe that their fellow-Christians have gone astray by giving what they call the Greek names of Jehovah and Jesus (which they say is another form of Zeus) to the Father and the Son. They claim to have Bible proof, as do all the different sects propagating their own peculiar brands of doctrine, for their use of the Holy Names.

When they adopted the Hebrew names for the Father and the Son, they also adopted the Hebrew name of Assembly Yahveh Beth Israel for their sect and began celebrating the Jewish holidays along with the Christian. "For the Passover and the other feast days were not abolished any more than was the Seventh Day Sabbath when Yashua came into the world," Brother Cessna argues. "Trouble is that those who use the pagan name of Christians to describe themselves lost the holy days when they lost the holy names."

Meanwhile, they draw no lines of division between themselves and those others who may worship the Lord of the universe under the traditional names. Ministers of all races and creeds are invited to preach to their congregations, which Brother Cessna says are now found in many states of the union. They believe that there will be a place in a Heaven where everybody will be of one race—the Lord's Israel of salvation—for those who worship in spirit and in truth.

"But the Lord's people will always be divided by creed so long as they are divided by race," Brother Cessna feels. "If our church follows Yashua's will by trying to bring the races together, there will be much less difficulty in bringing the creeds together.

"That was the message I tried to drive home to my people when we baptized a large group of white converts right after the race riots. I arranged that every last one of them should be put under the water by the colored bishop and

that they should receive the holy kiss from him when they came up out of it. 'If they won't accept the kiss from you,' I told the brother who was doing the baptizing, 'keep ducking them under until they are ready to accept the Scriptural salute from a black man.' "

That was my last day in Detroit. I was in a hurry to catch a bus back to Tennessee after having been away from Celia and the baby for a month. Brother Cessna was also rushed, since time was getting near for him to put on his coveralls and report for his shift at a local automobile plant.

"You know," he said, "the churches ought to get out among the people more and see what they are up against. They particularly need to help the labor movement fight the racist organizations that have already brought blood and suffering to Detroit. When we organized our union here, the Black Legion sent men into our meeting to try to terrorize us into calling off a strike which we were carrying on for recognition of our organization. But our people took sides with the union and against the Black Legion. I walked seventy-two hours at a stretch on a picket line and, afterwards, I only escaped their gunmen by a man on the inside telling me that they were out to kill me."

Meanwhile, Brother Cessna and the good saints of the Yahvists believe that there will be room on the Mount of Olives for both the followers of Brother Dugger and Brother Davison, as there is room on earth for both white men and black men. They've found room in their sect for Brother Dugger's one-time collaborator, Brother Dodd, who now acts as editor of their official magazine. Brother Dodd feels bitter toward Brother Dugger, but Brother Cessna disagrees with Brother Dodd on that score.

"Brother Dugger's a cantankerous old fellow who threw us all out of the Seventh Day Church of God," Brother Cessna admits. But then with the unsparing charity which he has for the faults of men, he says:

"You can't say he's a bad man, though, even when he won't speak to old friends like Brother Dodd and me for believing that the Lord ought to be called Yashua. He tells his people that we're heretics twisting the Scripture. But we tell our people that his folks are brothers trying to live by the Scripture as they understand it.

"Long before the rapture, the Lord's people in every church will know Him by His rightful name of Yashua the Messiah, and they will be united in His name when they reach the Mount of Olives."

Brother Cessna's eyes twinkled as he led me to the door and asked me to look up the Yahvist congregation of white saints and colored saints in Celia's home town of Nashville. "When all the folks are gathered together on that mountain," he said, "I guess you'll find Brother Davison and Brother Dugger both there shaking hands and making up with each other."

## CHAPTER XX

### FUTURE OF THE SMALL SECTS

All morning friends and neighbors had been dropping in to say good-bye. We were on our way to Texas where Celia and I hoped to reap a whole new crop of little sects that had sprouted during the six years of my absence. Mr. Charlie, the mailman, had stopped by to get our forwarding address and stayed for an hour tying up packages. Aunt Tut had brought us quantities of fried chicken, wrapped up in that new-fangled wax paper. Brother Myers came with a piece of soybean loaf, the food the strictly vegetarian Adventists call "mock meat," and Brother Dee arrived with his usual tale of woe.

"Son," he lamented, "how kin you go off to Texas an leave me in sech a peck of trouble?" Brother Dee shoved aside a pile of religious tracts and sat down on a packing box.

"Why, what's up now?" I asked sympathetically.

"Brother Harold, the ol Devil done got in Dee Tucker's way agin. We jest got the first church house of the Sanctified Church of God built when them two rascals, Al Yancey an Cleve Mankin, done went over to Jellico Courthouse an filed a deed on it. Then they give that ornery Jim Earl five dollars to come over an tell me not to go there no more. They done stole ever'thing—even the church name what the Lord done revealed to me in Jellico jail. But the Lord ain't like them servants of the Devil over at Jellico Courthouse. He don't recognize no stole property.

"Son," Brother Dee said in that pleading tone I had grown to know so well, "you got to help the Lord set His church in order. Them scoundrels ain't the Sanctified Church of God they's a-claimin to be. We gotta beat the Devil out of the

front path an let him take the hind path. Me an Sister Conley an the folks what stuck with us is still the Sanctified Church of God. But we's aimin to call ourselves the (Pure) Sanctified Church of God so nobody'll git us mixed up with that Yancey bunch of backsliders. We aim to build a church house of our own an I'll be a-holdin the deed to that."

Brother Dee looked at me and I looked at Celia, who held the money this time. She just walked into the kitchen, for, after all, that new crop of sects in Texas would surely need some watering.

Brother Dee left unwillingly, and I wondered if this new church would keep splitting like the amoeba and in six years would have daddied six new and lusty young-uns. And what of the future of the two hundred odd small sects and the ten million people who follow their prophets and exhorters?

New schisms had rocked the sanctified folks during our year in the Country of the Word. General Overseer Tompkins of the Conquerin Church of God had died, and the great man lay buried on Blackberry Mountain next to Sister Ebby, the least of his followers.

His boy, Oris—with the help of the Brother Storm Troopers—had seized all the church holdings and, like Esau, had robbed his twin brother, Avis, of his lawful inheritance. The large publishing house was in Oris' hands, as was Blackberry Mountain, chosen seat of the Church of God world capital. Brother Avis, up North, was left with a measly four churches which he incorporated as the Marching Church of God, with himself as Lieutenant General of the Lord Jehovah.

In other parts of the country new Holiness cults were stealing the followings of older sister sects, which were turning cold and respectable with more money in the jeans of the saints. Over in Louisville, Kentucky, Brother William Sowers and his School of the Prophets, founders of the Church of the First-Born, were holding forth night after night and



week after week in great camp meetings which drew saints from many an established Holiness denomination.

Brother Earl Ivie of the Firebrands for Jesus was giving Army chaplains in California military posts some competition by holding Victory Tent Revivals for soldiers all over that state, which is a victory garden of cults and sects. The Holiness brethren kept feuding and splitting till Brother Frank Alexander of the Firebrands wrote in desperation, "At Pentecost one hundred and twenty were in accord. Now hardly anyone ever agrees with another."

Brother David Lee Floyd of National City, California, a currently unattached prophet, was advising the saints to can up plenty of vegetables and keep their shoes mended against the day "when no man might buy or sell, save that he had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of the name." The saints of the Last Days Church of God, also looking toward the end, were busy piecing quilts. But with their usual flare for getting themselves advertised they sent the forty-eight finished quilts to the governors of the forty-eight states.

Millions of dollars were spent in Detroit, San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles and a dozen other cities to build huge barns called tabernacles for hell-roarin, free-lance preachers like Sister Ethel Willetts and Sister Faith Butt, as well as sundry gentlemen like Little Joe, who had struck pay dirt in one of Texas' biggest cities.

He was pastoring three thousand cotton-mill workers and day laborers in a Baptist tabernacle, disowned by the Southern Baptist denomination and leaning toward the Crooked Cross. His present wife went to the best beauty parlor and had charge accounts in the largest department stores. His first wife, long since forgotten, was taking in washing at Waco. She had moved there when the Messiah Chile, a willing wench still called Baby Angel by her many bedfellows, worked by day as a waitress in a nickel hamburger joint.

But evil days had fallen upon Big Joe, who seemed to have lost the Sperrit when he lost his teeth. He did a little cotton picking in the fall, a little stump howling in the winter for any Holiness sect that would pay him a dollar for a sermon. The rest of the time he lived on whatever he could beg from the Direct Relief Fund of the local Community Chest.

Whenever the old man asked Little Joe for a few dollars, the son reminded him that it took all his money to print his weekly paper, distributed free by carrier to every home in the city. Each Monday this paper, carrying Little Joe's Sunday attacks on the government, was circulated throughout the town. And, in spite of paper rationing, other inspired "Scriptorians" were deluging America with tons of printed "gospel messages."

Stunning young lady ministers like Dr. Bebe H. Patten of Chicago, were peddling thousands of copies of their books, bearing such titles as *Should a Woman Preach?* and *Bobbed-Haired Mammies vs. Hepcat Daughters*. Publisher Herrstrom of *Bible News Flashes*, having gone into Jew-baiting, was turning a pretty penny from his latest masterpiece, *Is God a Jew?* From the press of Jehovah's Witnesses, located in an old slum of Brooklyn, poured a steady stream of books and pamphlets which were translated into twenty languages and bootlegged by outlawed cultists of the sect's universal underground circling the globe.

In Lexington, Kentucky, Pastor Clarence Walker, sponsored by "Kentucky's largest furniture store," collected a million names in his unaffiliated Ashland Avenue Baptist Temple to further the circulation of his weekly of the Crooked Cross, *The Ashland Avenue Baptist*. Not to be outdone, the Reverend Harry Hodge of the United Gospel Tabernacles decided to distribute his *Prophetic Times* gratis.

The Seventh Day Adventists broadcast a weekly program, "The Voice of Prophecy," over a nationwide network and

offered a free Bible correspondence course to anyone who would write in asking for it. They were getting puny competition from Brother Dugger's Seventh Day Church of God, offering free correspondence lessons in prophecy and broadcasting over a few second-rate stations on the West Coast. Uncle Ike Burden wrote us from Indiana that he'd "done sold his radio" because he "couldn't git no more news casts without listenin to the crack of doom first."

In Winston-Salem, North Carolina, white and colored tobacco workers held some of their first union meetings in a Negro Holiness church. One of their first leaders was the black brother, the Reverend Purnell Bonaparte. Down in Alexandria, Louisiana, Brother J. R. Tackett of the Church of God (Reformation Movement) began inviting Negroes to come into his church house with their Scotch-Irish and Cajun French neighbors. For Brother Tackett testifies with Uncle Billy and the Apostle Paul that "of one blood hath He created all the nations of the earth and set them in their appointed places."

The Jehovah's Witnesses, backed by the Seventh Day Adventists, won a memorable victory when the United States Supreme Court ruled that local communities might not penalize freedom of thought by taxing tracts and magazines. But dozens of their ministers went to prison rather than compromise the principles of Jehovah's Witnesses about war. And two Seventh Day Churches of God circulated earnest little pamphlets protesting the slaughter of Europe's Jews.

For the world is catching up with the unworldly and the other worldly, dividing them on the same world issues which move and divide all of us. They are learning to talk in something else besides parables. They are beginning firmly, and with the force of history on their side, to demand that there be no more hard times and no more wars.

Will the new seasons coming now that the war is over

sprout a new crop of strange and outlandish little sects? It is true that America's past wars have been followed by new depressions which gave birth to new cults.

The many little Baptist and Methodist sects sprouting up between the Revolutionary and Civil Wars were the seeds sown in the stony acres of the backlands. They were the scrubby wild wheat reaped by the common folk shut out from the universities and the cities, the ballot boxes and the rich lands of the bottoms. The Mormon sects of the 1830's trace their origin to squatters in the hills of New York state. The Adventists of the 1840's found their first followers among poor farmers and wage-earning folk who wanted the world to come to an end because they had little to live for.

The first Holiness sects began meeting in log cabins and one-room school houses shortly after the Civil War. So did the original ancestors of Jehovah's Witnesses calling themselves the International Bible Students. Whatever their differences of theology, these sects were all built on the common foundation of poverty and resentment against the prosperous world which the folk called Babylon. As Babylon became more prosperous and the people outside the walls poorer, the more little armies waving calico flags of Jehovah gathered against it.

In spite of their failings, these little sects were for generations the only functioning democracies for millions of the disinherited, disfranchised and dispossessed. This was particularly true in the South, where a poor man was barred by the tax on voting from becoming a judge or a senator. But he could be elected chief steward of the local Congregational Methodist Church, or moderator of his district association of the Duck River Baptists. A poor boy with talent couldn't go to college and become a lawyer or business man. But he could exercise his bent for leadership when the Lord "give him the call to preach" in one of the little sects. And that little sect was the one place where he might speak his mind,

where every man stood equal with every other man before God. It was the place where Aunt Tut stood equal with her better-off cousin, Mr. Marion, the storekeeper.

As the last strings were being tied around our boxes, Sister Allie came in to say good-bye and make one more effort to get Celia saved. She handed her a little grey pamphlet, written by Brother Rosser over at Beersheba Springs and entitled "I was a Hog Thief Till I Got Saved."

As we stepped into the car to leave Celia's Country of the Word for mine, our neighbors gathered to wave us good-bye. There was Uncle Billy, nodding his great bushy head up and down, and Aunt Tut waving her apron. There was Brother Myers the Watcher, gazing after our car through his telescope until we turned the bend of the road leading out toward the highway.

And there was Brother Dee who had come to see us off after praying out his mad spell because we had failed to give him a parting donation. "Save your pennies," I told Celia. "We'll be running into Brother Dee wherever we go."

The car rolled on toward town. The baby played with a red rag doll which Aunt Tut had made for him as a going-away present.

Celia turned to me and said, "I feel the warmth of Heaven in my heart."

For the Lord our God is the people's God. And the people worship Him in spirit and in truth.

THE END















UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY



130 455

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY